

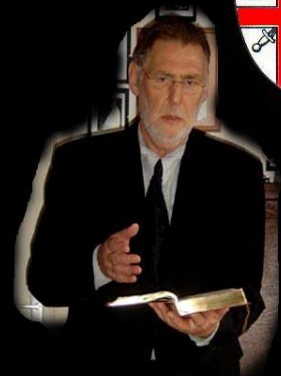


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**Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet  
and a light unto my path.  
Psalm 119: 105**



ds. Philippe L. De Coster, B.Th., D.D.

**Evangelical House Churches**

## **Letters to the Corinthians 1 and 2 Commented**

by

**Rev. Philippe L. De Coster, B.Th., D.D.**



*Ancient Corinth*

## Foreword by the Superintendant

Corinth is the name of an ancient Greek polis (city-state) and nearby isthmus that lent its name to a set of Pan-Hellenic games, a war, and a style of architecture. In works attributed to Homer, you may find Corinth referred to as Ephyre. Corinth in the middle of Greece that it is called 'isthmus' means it is a neck of land, but the Isthmus of Corinth serves as more of an Hellenic waist separating the upper, mainland part of Greece and the lower Peloponnesian parts. The city of Corinth was a rich, important, cosmopolitan, commercial area, having one harbour that allowed trade with Asia, and another that led to Italy. From the 6th century B.C., the Diolkos, a paved route up to six meters wide designed for fast passage, led from the Gulf of Corinth on the west to the Saronic Gulf on the east.

Corinth in the mythology, Sisyphus, a grandfather of Bellerophon -- the Greek hero who rode Pegasus the winged horse -- founded Corinth. [This may be a story invented by Eumelos (fl. 760 B.C.), a poet of the Bacchiadae family.] This makes the city not one of the Dorian cities -- like those in the Peloponnese -- founded by the Heracleidae, but Aiolian (Aeolian). The Corinthians, however, claimed descent from Aletes, who was a descendant of Hercules from the Dorian invasion. Pausanias explains that at the time when the Heracleidae invaded the Peloponnese, Corinth was ruled by descendants of Sisyphus named Doeidas and Hyanthidas, who abdicated in favour of Aletes whose family kept the throne for five generations until the first of the Bacchiads, Bacchis., gained control.

Archaeological finds show that Corinth was inhabited in the neolithic and early Helladic periods. Australian classicist and archaeologist Thomas James Dunbabin (1911-1955) says the nu-theta (nth) in the name Corinth shows it is a pre-Greek name. The oldest preserved building survives from the 6th century B.C. It is a temple, probably to Apollo. The earliest ruler's name is Bakthis, who may have ruled in the ninth century. Cypselus overthrew Bakthis' successors, the Bacchiads, c.657 B.C., after which Periander became tyrant. He is credited with having created the Diolkos. In c. 585, an oligarchical council of 80 replaced the last tyrant. Corinth colonized Syracuse and Corcyra at about the same time it got rid of its kings.

*" And the Bacchiadae, a rich and numerous and illustrious family, became tyrants of Corinth, and held their empire for nearly two hundred years, and without disturbance reaped the fruits of the commerce; and when Cypselus overthrew these, he himself became tyrant, and his house endured for three generations...."*

Pausanias gives another account of this early, confusing, legendary period of Corinthian history:

*" [2.4.4] Aletes himself and his descendants reigned for five generations to Bacchis, the son of Prumnis, and, named after him, the Bacchidae reigned for five more generations to Telestes, the son of Aristodemus. Telestes was killed in hate by Arieus and Perantas, and there were no more kings, but Prytanēs (Presidents) taken from the Bacchidae and ruling for one year, until Cypselus, the son of Eetion, became tyrant and expelled the Bacchidae.<sup>11</sup> Cypselus was a descendant of Melas, the son of Antasus. Melas from Gonussa above Sicyon joined the Dorians in the expedition against Corinth. When the god expressed disapproval Aletes at first ordered Melas to withdraw to other Greeks, but afterwards, mistaking the oracle, he received him as a settler. Such I found to be the history of the Corinthian kings." Pausanias, op.cit.*

In the middle of the sixth century, Corinth allied with Spartan, but later opposed the Spartan King Cleomenes' political interventions in Athens. It was aggressive actions of Corinth against Megara that led to the Peloponnesian War. Although Athens and Corinth were at odds during this war, by the time of the Corinthian War (395 - 386 B.C.), Corinth had joined Argos, Boeotia and Athens against Sparta.

After the Greeks lost to Philip of Macedonia at Chaeronea, the Greeks signed terms Philip insisted on so he could turn his attention to Persia. They made oaths not to overthrow Philip or his successors, or one another, in exchange for local autonomy and were joined together in a federation that we today call the League of Corinth. Members of the Corinthian League were responsible for levies of troops (for use by Philip) depending on the size of the city.

Romans besieged Corinth during the second Macedonian War, but the city continued in Macedonian hands until the Romans decreed it independent and part of the Achaean confederacy after Rome defeated the Macedonians at Cynoscephalae. Rome kept a garrison in Corinth's Acrocorinth -- the city's high spot and citadel.

Corinth failed to treat Rome with the respect it demanded. Strabo describes how Corinth provoked Rome:

*" The Corinthians, when they were subject to Philip, not only sided with him in his quarrel with the Romans, but individually behaved so contemptuously towards the Romans that certain persons ventured to pour down filth upon the Roman ambassadors when passing by their house.*

*For this and other offences, however, they soon paid the penalty, for a considerable army was sent thither...."*

Roman consul Lucius Mummius destroyed Corinth in 146 B.C., looting it, killing the men, selling the children and women, and burning what remained.

*" [2.1.2] Corinth is no longer inhabited by any of the old Corinthians, but by colonists sent out by the Romans. This change is due to the Achaean League. The Corinthians, being members of it, joined in the war against the Romans, which Critolaus, when appointed general of the Achaeans, brought about by persuading to revolt both the Achaeans and the majority of the Greeks outside the Peloponnesus. When the Romans won the war, they carried out a general disarmament of the Greeks and dismantled the walls of such cities as were fortified. Corinth was laid waste by Mummius, who at that time commanded the Romans in the field, and it is said that it was afterwards refounded by Caesar, who was the author of the present constitution of Rome. Carthage, too, they say, was refounded in his reign." Pausanias; op. cit.*

By the time of the New Testament's the apostle Paul (author of *Corinthians*), Corinth was a booming Roman town, having been made a colony by Julius Caesar in 44 B.C. -- Colonia Laus Iulia Corinthiensis. Rome rebuilt the city in Roman fashion, and settled it, mostly with freedmen, who grew prosperous within two generations. In the early 70s A.D., Emperor Vespasian established a second Roman colony at Corinth -- Colonia Iulia Flavia Augusta Corinthiensis. It had an amphitheatre, a circus, and other characteristic buildings and monuments. After the Roman conquest, the official language of Corinth was Latin until the time of Emperor Hadrian, when it became Greek. Located by the Isthmus, Corinth was responsible for the Isthmian Games, second in importance to the Olympics and held every two years in the spring.

What does spiritual freedom mean to a new Christian? When everyone around is caught up in immorality, and one is bombarded with constant temptation, how is one standing for righteousness? The fledgling church in Corinth was floundering with these questions, as the believers struggled to sort out their new found faith while living in a city overtaken with corruption and idolatry.

The Apostle Paul had planted the church in Corinth, and now, just a few years later, he was receiving questioning letters and reports of problems. The church was troubled with division, lawsuits between believers, sexual sins, disorderly worship, and overall spiritual immaturity. Paul wrote this uncompromising letter to confront and correct these Christians, answer their questions, and instruct

them in several areas. He warned them not to be conformed to the world around them, but rather, to live as godly examples, reflecting Christ likeness in the midst of an immoral ancient Greek society of the time.

The young Corinthian church was located in the midst of a large, decadent seaport--a city deeply immersed in pagan idolatry and immorality, quite normal to the Greek culture of the time. The believers were primarily Gentiles converted by Paul on his second missionary journey. In Paul's absence the church had fallen into serious problems of disunity, sexual immorality, confusion over church discipline and other matters involving worship and holy living.

The Corinthian church was divided over leadership. Some followed the teachings of Paul, others favoured the words of Cephas, and some preferred what Apollos had to say. Intellectual pride, Paul pointed out, was firmly at the centre of this spirit of division. In his letter, Paul urged the Corinthians to focus on Christ and not his messengers. The church is Christ's body where God's spirit dwells. If the church family is separated by disunity, then it ceases to work together and grow in love with Jesus Christ as the head.

The Corinthian believers were also divided on certain practices not expressly forbidden in Scripture, such as eating meat that had been sacrificed to idols. Self-centeredness was the root of this division. In such matters, Paul stressed spiritual freedom, although not at the expense of other believers whose faith might be fragile. If we have freedom in an area that another Christian might consider sinful behaviour, we are to be sensitive and considerate, sacrificing our freedom out of love for our weaker brothers and sisters.

The Corinthian church had lost its appreciation for the holiness of God which is our standard for holy living. In doing so, the church could no longer effectively minister to one another or be a witness to unbelievers outside the church.

By ignoring blatant sin among its members, the Corinthian church was further contributing to division and weakness in the body. Paul gave practical instructions for how to deal with immorality in the church.

An overarching theme in the book of 1 Corinthians is the need for true Christian love--love that will settle lawsuits and conflicts between brothers. A lack of genuine love was clearly an undercurrent in the Corinthian church, creating disorder in worship and the misuse of spiritual gifts. Paul spent a great deal of time describing the proper role of spiritual gifts and dedicated an entire chapter--1 Corinthians 13--to the definition of love.

The believers in Corinth were divided because of misunderstandings over the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ and the future resurrection of his followers. Paul wrote to clear confusion on this crucial matter which is so important to living out our faith in light of eternity.

Second Corinthians is a deeply personal and arousing letter--a response to the complex history between the Apostle Paul and the church he had established in Corinth. The circumstances behind this letter reveal the difficult, often painful realities of life in the ministry. More than any of his letters, this one shows us the heart of Paul as a pastor.

This letter is actually Paul's fourth letter to the church in Corinth. Paul mentions his first letter in 1 Corinthians 5:9. His second letter is the book of 1 Corinthians. Three times in 2 Corinthians Paul references a third and painful letter: "For I wrote to you out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears ..." (2 Corinthians 2:4, ESV). And finally, we have Paul's fourth letter, the book of 2 Corinthians.

As we learned in 1 Corinthians, the church in Corinth was weak, struggling with division and spiritual immaturity. Paul's authority had been undermined by an opposing teacher who was misleading and dividing with false teachings.

In an attempt to solve the turmoil, Paul travelled to Corinth, but the distressing visit only fuelled the church's resistance. When Paul returned to Ephesus he wrote again to the church, pleading with them to repent and avoid God's judgement. Later Paul received good news through Titus that many in Corinthian had indeed repented, but a small and fractious group continued to cause problems there.

In 2 Corinthians, Paul laid out his defence, refuting and condemning the false teachers. He also encouraged the faithful to stay committed to the truth and reaffirmed his deep love for them.

The book of 2 Corinthians is quite relevant today, especially for those who feel called to Christian ministry. The first half of the book details the duties and privileges of a leader. The epistle is also a tremendous source of hope and encouragement for anyone suffering through trials.

Paul was no stranger to suffering. He had endured much opposition, persecution, and even a physical "thorn in the flesh" (2 Corinthians 12:7). Through painful experiences, Paul had learned how to comfort others. And so it is for anyone who wishes to follow in Christ's footsteps.

Immorality in the church needs to be dealt with wisely and appropriately. The church's role is too important to allow sin and false teachings to go unchecked. The goal of church discipline is not to punish, but to correct and restore. Love must be the guiding force.

By keeping our eyes on the glories of heaven, we can endure our present sufferings. In the end we overcome this world. Also, Paul encouraged continued generosity among the members of the Corinthian church as a means of spreading God's kingdom.

Finally, Paul wasn't trying to win a popularity contest when he confronted the false teaching in Corinth. No, he knew that integrity of doctrine was vital to the health of the church. His sincere love for the believers is what drove him to defend his authority as an apostle of Jesus Christ.

Whether in first or second Corinthians, they needed to be rebuked for their disloyalty to God's servant and God's truth. The money for the poor saints in Jerusalem needed to be collected. So Paul decided to write a letter and send it with Titus. And this letter was a strong rebuke. He wrote it probably in the summer of 54. This letter is lost. Commentators call it "The Severe Letter." We don't have it.

There was even a letter before that we don't have...the very first letter he wrote, referred to in 1 Corinthians 5:9 in which he rebuked them for their immorality. So you have letter number one, sometime after he left, probably soon after he left. First Corinthians doesn't come till three years later. Soon after he left came the letter on immorality which we don't have, we have a reference to it. Then came 1 Corinthians, then came a second lost letter, rebuking them again. Titus took that. He came back, gave the report in chapter 7. And here came the last letter.

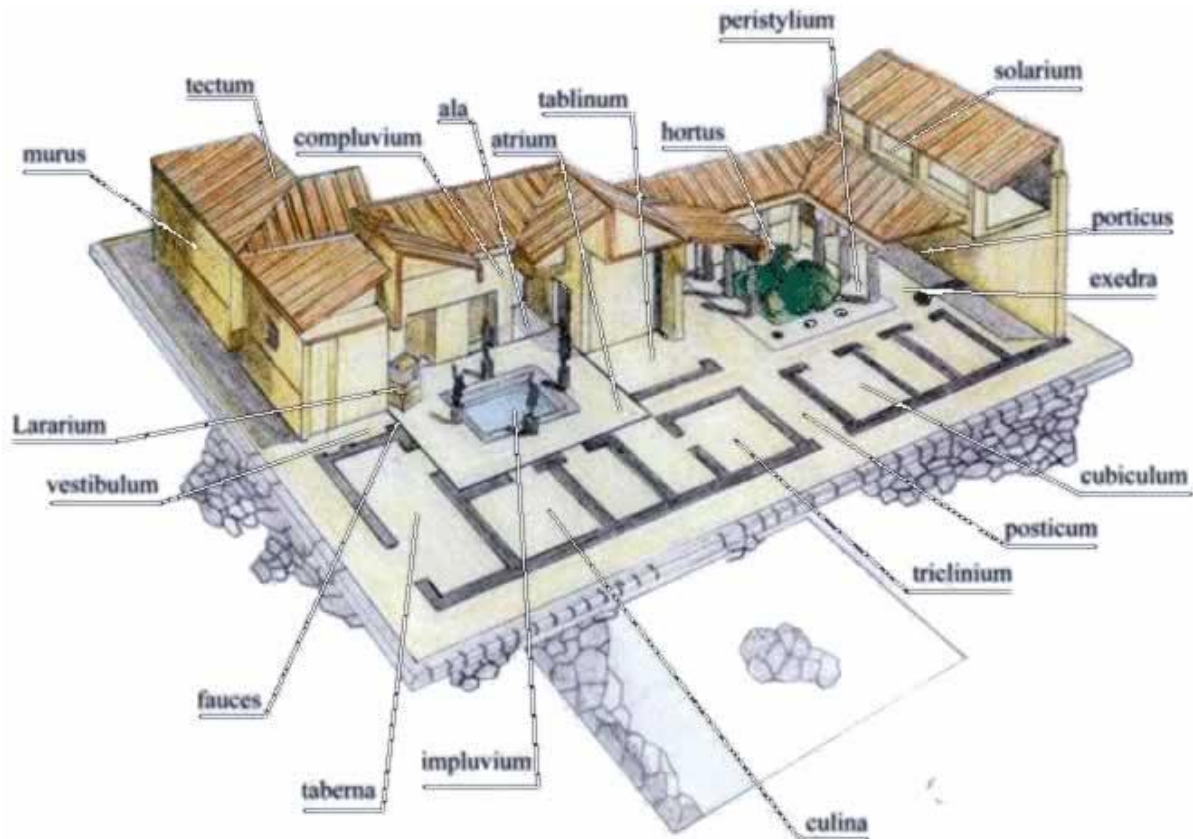
Some people are still sympathetic to the false apostles. Some are still victims of sin. And it's out of this mixed emotion, gratitude for those who have responded and concern for those who haven't that he writes this letter. And he says the common greeting, which needs no comment, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." Grace is God's favour. Peace is one of its benefits. And he wishes them God's grace and God's peace.

To conclude, no matter how hard the work of a messenger of Christ might be, no matter how trying and troublesome the fellowship of the church might be, no matter how weak and sinful the people might be, no matter how much turmoil and distress comes and goes, we are called to be faithful and to give all we have



in the service of Christ. That's what you're going to see in this letter from the heart...remembering that our God and His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, has given us the richness of the promise that the work we do is His, the people we serve are His, the strength we need is His and the glory in the end belongs to Him.

Rev. Ph. L. De Coster, B.Th., D.D.



*An example of a large “Domus Ecclesiae (House church)”*  
**More about a “Domus Ecclesiae” at Capharnaum**



*Apostle Peter at Capharnaum and Domus Ecclesiae (House church)*



## The Fourth Century Domus Ecclesia

In the late fourth century AD one special room(1) of St. Peter House, measuring 5.80 by 6.45 m., became a Domus Ecclesia, i.e. was used for religious gatherings.

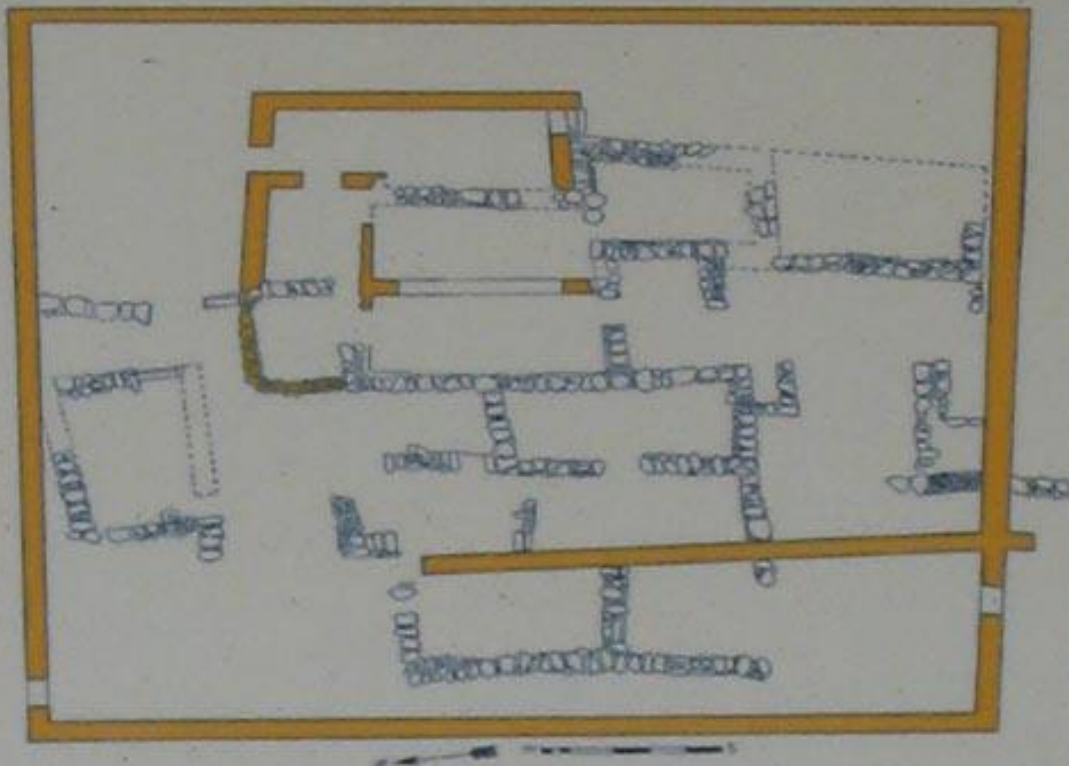
In the fourth century the traditional House of Peter was set apart from the rest of the town through the construction of an enclosure wall encompassing a perimeter of 112.55 m.

The venerated hall became a tripartite structure through the construction of a central arch and the addition of an eastern atrium.

A polychrome pavement replaced the white plastered floors of the first century AD while the inner walls received additional coatings of painted plaster. The Christians pilgrims left many inscriptions in Greek, Aramaic, Syriac and Latin.

This Domus Ecclesia is referred to by Eteria in the late fourth century when she writes: "The house of the prince of the Apostles (i.e. Peter) was changed into a church. The walls, however, (of that house) are still standing as they were (originally)".

## The Fourth Century Domus Ecclesia



## Sex in the Ancient World, Greece and Rome

Since the dawn of history every civilisation had prescribed severe laws against at least some kinds of sexual immorality. The oldest surviving legal codes (c 2100 -1700 BCE), draw up by the kings of Babylon, made adultery punishable by death, and most other near eastern and classical cultures also treated it as a serious offence: this was the view taken by the Assyrians, the ancient Egyptians, the Jews, the Greeks, and, to some extent, the Romans. The main concern of such laws was usually to uphold the honour and property right of fathers, husbands, and higher-status groups. The same outlook underpinned the justice of the Germanic tribes that settled across western Europe and the British Isles in the final years of the roman empire... Thus the earliest English law codes, which date from this time, evoke a society where women were bought and sold, and lived constantly under the guardianship of men. (*Faramerz Dabhoiwala – Oxford*<sup>1</sup>)

In Ancient Greece, boys were considered sexually desirable from the start of puberty until late adolescence, but stopped being so at the appearance of the beard and pubic hair. Athenians considered love affairs between adult and adolescent males as natural and honourable, on condition that sexual etiquette was respected. The term used to describe the sexual pursuit of adolescent males by adult males was “paederastia”. In stark contrast to modern attitudes towards sex between teachers and students, paederastia was usually conceptualized as a pedagogic and erotic mentoring relationship between an adult male, the “erastes” (lover), and a young, passive “pais” (boy), called the “eromenos” (beloved), usually between 12 and 17-20 years old... Often presented as a normal part of the education of a young man, paederastia institutionalised a relationship in which the mentor instructed the boy in philosophical matters and general knowledge, and prepared him for his citizenship role. (*Veronique Mottier – Professor Lausanne, Cambridge*<sup>2</sup>)

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<sup>1</sup> Dr Faramerz Dabhoiwala, BA, MA, D.Phil. Quondam Fellow since 1998, Fellow and Tutor, Exeter College, Oxford, University Lecturer in Modern History.

<sup>2</sup> Véronique Mottier: University Post: Professor in Sociology (part-time, University of Lausanne) Faculty/Department: Politics, Psychology, Sociology and International Studies (PPSIS), College Offices Currently Held: Fellow. Degrees Obtained: Certificat d’Etudes Françaises Modernes, Faculté des Lettres, University of Geneva BA & MA in Political Science, University of Geneva BA in Sociology, University of Geneva, PhD in Social and Political Sciences, University of Cambridge.

Relationships between men were socially acceptable, common, and widely reflected in the literature, art, and philosophy of the time. Attitudes to male-to-male sex were not homogeneous, however, and disputes on whether desire for young men or for women was superior abounded. Some argued that love for men was superior to that for women, since love between equals was preferable to that for inferior creatures. (*Veronique Mottier – Professor Lausanne, Cambridge*)

Certainly, for most Graeco-Romans, the idea of classifying people according to the gender of the person they have sex with would have seemed downright bizarre. Antiquity was not a culture of sexual libertarianism. Sexual morality was highly regulated by moral and legal rules. However, moral preoccupations centred on sexual practices, not on the subject of desire. The ancients did not make sense of themselves in terms of sexual identities, whereas the policing of gender identity was of central importance to them, as we shall see. Consider the contrast with the ways in which modern subjects make sense of their sexual experiences. Categories such as heterosexual and homosexual are a central source upon which we draw in order to make sense of their own sexuality. (*Veronique Mottier – Professor Lausanne, Cambridge*)

Seduction of a free Athenian woman was a crime which was generally deemed more serious than rape, because a secret liaison meant that a man could not be sure of the lineage of his children, whereas in the case of rape any offspring could be identified and killed. Rape was thus primarily seen as a crime against the husband, father, or male guardian of the woman rather than against herself, and as a threat to public order due to the risk of revenge from the aggrieved male party. (*Veronique Mottier – Professor Lausanne, Cambridge*)

No convincing evidence exists of temple prostitution in ancient Greece or Rome, in contrast to the ancient Near East, where the practice of sacred slave-prostitutes serving visitors was widespread; but prostitutes did have their own religious festivals in Rome, and more generally attended religious festivals either as worshippers or to work the crowds. (*Veronique Mottier – Professor Lausanne, Cambridge*)

It is important to remember that Rome and Athens did not form a single homogeneous, unitary culture. Whereas Roman sexual ethics were quite similar to those of classical Greece, the most marked difference was that sodomy was

much more problematic within Roman culture, and pederastic relationships (and their supposed educational advantages) were not generally idealised. Relations with free-born men and boys were legally prohibited in Roman morality laws such as the Lex Iulia, though it was legal for a free man to have sex with male prostitutes, slaves or foreign young men (as long as he performed the active role) or to frequent brothels. Such laws were periodically re-enacted in the Empire to demonstrate the respective emperors' concern for public morality; however, they were rarely enforced. Reflecting Greek cultural influence, revered Roman poets such as Catullus, Ovid, Horace and Virgil wrote of love affairs between men, and one of Tibullus' poems described his heartbreak at having been left for a woman by his young male lover Marathus. (*Veronique Mottier – Professor Lausanne, Cambridge*)

In the Mosaic law there was no rejection of polygamy, and it was practised occasionally by Jews into New Testament times and by some early Christians; but Christians have long rejected this. (*William Montgomery Watt – Professor Edinburgh*<sup>3</sup>)

### **Christianity and sex**

Though Jesus is not recorded as having said much on the subject, he evidently did not condone adultery or promiscuity, and the later leaders of his religion developed in increasingly restrictive doctrines of sexual morality. In doing so, they drew upon many earlier teachings, so that the outcome was, as one scholar puts it, “a complex assemblage of pagan and Jewish purity regulations, linked with primitive beliefs about the relationship between sex and the holy, joined to Stoic teachings about sexual ethics, and bound together by a patchwork of (new) doctrinal theories”.

Jewish law had been fairly tolerant of fornication between unmarried men and women, of men using Gentile prostitutes, and of concubines – indeed, as the Bible recorded, the ancient Hebrews had often had multiple wives.

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<sup>3</sup> William Montgomery Watt (1909- ) Professor (Emeritus) of Arabic and Islamic Studies at the University of Edinburgh. Professor William Montgomery Watt, has gifted to the Library part of his notable collection printed books on Islam. Educated at the Universities of Edinburgh, Jena, and at Balliol College, Oxford, he held the post of Assistant Lecturer in Moral Philosophy at Edinburgh from 1934 to 1938, Lecturer in Ancient Philosophy 1946-1947, and successively Lecturer, Senior Lecturer and Reader in Arabic 1947-1964. In 1964 he accepted the Chair from which he retired in 1979.

After the above research work about homosexuality, I finally get why the Bible is apparently anti-gay. The real obsession of the Hebrew Scriptures isn't about what people do in bed; that's a more modern fixation. What the Scriptures are really concerned with is [producing] children... the people of ancient Israel were obsessed with their own survival. (*Giles Fraser – Church of England priest, Oxford*)

Christian ideals promoted virginity and sexual abstinence for men as well as women. ... sexual desire came to be blamed for binding humans to their worldly obligations to spouse or children. It prevented them from concentrating on spirituality in furtherance of the coming of the kingdom of heaven, and preparation for the afterlife. Christina hostility towards sex reflects this wider religious project of freeing humans from their worldly ties and desires. Celibacy and purity came to be valorised, whereas sex and desire became policed. (*Veronique Mottier – Professor Lausanne, Cambridge*)

The taint of sin was thought to pollute humans from the moment of birth. As John Calvin, the Swiss Reformer put it, a newborn baby is “a seedbed of sin and therefore cannot but be odious and abominable to God”.

“Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery.” (Mark 10:11-12) [*contrast – italics added*]  
“Anyone who divorces his wife, *except for marital unfaithfulness*, and marries another woman commits adultery.” (Matt 19:9)

“This is what the Lord Almighty says ... ‘Now go and strike Amalek and devote to destruction all that they have. Do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.’” (1 Samuel 15:3)

“In the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error.” (Romans 1:27)

At the time the author was writing the course “[Berea Pastoral Psychology](#)”, he also studies the practice of permanent sexual renunciation – continence, celibacy, life-long virginity as opposed to observance of temporary periods of sexual abstinence – that developed among men and women in Christian circles

in the period from a little before the missionary journeys of Saint Paul, in the 40s and 50s AD, to a little after the death of Saint Augustine, in 430 AD.

His principal concern has been to make clear the notions of the human person and of society implied in such renunciations, and to follow in detail the reflection and controversy which these notions generated, among Christian writers, on such topics as the nature of sexuality, the relation of men and women, and the structure and meaning of society.

To be frank: the author frequently observed during his ministry between 1974 and 2010 that the sharp and dangerous flavour of many Christian notions of sexual renunciation, both in their person and their social consequences, have been rendered tame and insipid, through being explained away as no more than inert borrowings from a supposed pagan or Jewish “background”. But an effort to do justice to the particularity of certain strains of Christian thought and practice should not be held to justify the systematic dismissal of the complex and resilient ecology of moral notions that characterised the Mediterranean culture of the age; still less should it encourage us to ignore the profound changes in the structure of ancient society in this period.

The very matter-of-fact manner in which monastic sources report bloody, botched attempts at self-castration by desperate monks shocks us by its lack of surprise. Sexual intercourse is a universal human practice. Yet sex also has a history. How we think about it, what meanings we invest in it, how we treat it as a society – all these things differ greatly across time and place. For most of western history the public punishment of men and women [who had a child outside of marriage] was a normal event. Sometimes they were treated more harshly, sometimes less, but all sex outside marriage was illegal, and the church, the state, and ordinary people devoted huge efforts to suppressing and punishing it. It seemed obvious that illicit relations angered God, prevented salvation, damaged personal relations, and undermined social order. Nobody seriously disagreed with this, even if men and women regularly gave way to temptation and have to be flogged, imprisoned, fined and shamed, in order to remind them. Though the details varied from place to place, every European society promoted the ideal of sexual discipline and punished people for consensual non-marital sex. So did their colonial off-shoots, in North America and elsewhere. This was a central feature of Christian civilisation, one that had steadily grown importance since the early middle ages. In Britain alone by the early seventeenth century, thousands of men and women suffered the consequences every year. Sometimes, as we shall see, they were even put to death. Nowadays we regard such practices with repugnance. We associate them with the Taliban, with Sharia law, with people far away and alien in outlook. Yet until quite recently,



until the Enlightenment, our own culture was like this too. This was one of the main differences between the pre-modern and the modern world. The emergence of modern attitudes to sex in the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries therefore constituted a great revolution.

Jewish law had been fairly tolerant of fornication between unmarried men and women, of men using Gentile prostitutes, and of concubines – indeed, as the Bible recorded, the ancient Hebrews had often had multiple wives. In its earliest centuries, Christianity too seems to have tolerated concubinage. More generally, however, the leaders of the new religion interpreted God’s commands as forbidding any sex at all outside marriage: that way lay hell-fire and damnation. Many of them were so repelled by sexual relations that they saw even marriage as a less pure and desirable state than complete celibacy. Already in Christianity’s earliest surviving texts this message is spelled out by St Paul, the dominant figure of the early church. “it is good for a man not to touch a woman”, he explained to the Christian community at Corinth around the middle of the first century... In the centuries that followed, the leading authorities of the church (most of whom were themselves celibate men) developed further this essentially negative view of sex.

The middle ages saw a considerable acceleration in the theory and practice of sexual discipline. Between the eleventh and the thirteenth centuries, the western church greatly expanded its power in this sphere, in line with its growing social and intellectual dominance. That adulterers ought to be put to death was the ideal of Luther, Zwingli, Bucer, Bullinger, and other leading reformers.

The argument of this book has been that the origin of modern western attitudes to sex lies in the great intellectual and social revolutions of the eighteenth century. For well over a thousand years, from the early middle ages to the seventeenth century, the enforcement of ever-stricter public discipline over sexual behaviour was a central preoccupation of every Christian community across the globe – yet by 1800 this had been replaced by a fundamentally different outlook. ... In place of a relatively coherent, authoritative world view that had endured for centuries, the Enlightenment left a much greater confusion and plurality of moral perspectives, with irresolvable tensions between them. That has been part of our modern condition ever since. It was not until 1991 that English law formally recognised the concept of rape within marriage.

Until the 1830s Englishmen were regularly executed for “buggery”: between 1810 and 1835, forty-six men were judicially killed for this crime. Thousands more were publicly humiliated in the pillory, or sentenced to jail for their unnatural perversions. Oscar Wilde’s imprisonment at hard labour for two years

in 1895 is only the best-known example. Even more remarkable than this Victorian severity is that, in numerical terms at least, it was vastly outstripped by the huge twentieth-century increase in legal persecution of homosexual behaviour. At the time of Wilde's trial, such incidents amounted to about 5 per cent of all trials for crimes against a person; by the later 1950s, the figure had increased to over 20 per cent – in other words, thousands of persecutions a year. The same dramatic surge took place in other European countries and across the United States. To curb homosexuality, perhaps even to exterminate it, was for many decades a prominent concern of public policy.

How old is the universe? Well, science painstakingly reckons it's about 14 billion years, give or take the odd billion. Not so, says religious authority: it is 6000 years old. Where did you get that from? The Bible! What evidence? The Bible! I see: on what grounds do you trust the Bible? Because the Bible tells me so! I had long since grown tired of that kind of circularity. ... I don't mind you sticking to a 3000 year old myth of creation that says God made the universe in six days. It's eccentric, but I can live with it unless you try to impose your eccentricity on everyone else. But where women and gays are concerned it is not just an eccentric opinion, it is an active injustice ... Your opinion has solid consequences for the lives of men and women, some of them terrifying. (*Richard Holloway – Professor Gresham, formerly Bishop of Edinburgh*)<sup>4</sup>

The canonical Gospels do not comment on Jesus's marital status. The norm for 1st-century rabbis was to marry well before 30. New Testament sources are familiar with husband-wife teams, like Priscilla and Aquila in the letters of Paul, among the earliest missionaries. The New Testament also states that bishops should be married. According to 1 Timothy, an indication that a man is ready to take on a leadership role is his ability to discipline his children with wisdom and without anger. So from a historical perspective, it is really

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<sup>4</sup> Richard Holloway, was Bishop of Edinburgh and Primus of the Scottish Episcopal Church. A former Gresham Professor of Divinity and Chairman of the Joint Board of the Scottish Arts Council and Scottish Screen, he is a fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh. He has written for many newspapers in Britain, including The Times, Guardian, Observer, Herald and the Scotsman. He is the author of over twenty other books, including, *Between The Monster And The Saint*. His latest book is *Leaving Alexandria: A Memoir of Faith and Doubt*. Holloway has presented many series for BBC television and radio.

the idea that Jesus might not have been married that might surprise us. (Kate Cooper – Professor Manchester<sup>5</sup>)

I would love it if every clergyperson would stand up and say to their congregations: “Sometimes the Bible is misunderstood.” There is a taken-for-grantedness in conservative Christian culture worldwide—and it’s true, I think, in much of mainline Christianity today as well—that understanding the Bible is simple. And, if the Bible says something is wrong, then that pretty much settles it. There are very few Christians who are willing to stand up and say, “Sometimes the Bible is not quite clear.” Yet, I think that’s really important for Christians to say occasionally... what they think about some passages of the Bible.

Obvious examples are passages in the Bible that say slavery is OK. And, there are some passages in the Bible that absolutely prohibit divorce. In Mark 10:9, it’s complete. Matthew has an exception clause: except for reasons of adultery. Then, there are clearly passages in the New Testament that expect Jesus to come again very soon from their point in time. Now, 2,000 years have passed. There are so many more examples where in plain terms we need to say, “Sometimes the Bible is misunderstood at will.”

If the established churches do not change, it is better to promote at large Home Churches (*Domus Ecclesiae*)... something I wish every Christian should know, and I say this as a deeply committed Christian myself: sometimes the Bible is wrong because willingly misunderstood. It not only tells us about the wisdom and insights and experiences of our spiritual ancestors, but also contains their limited vision, their acceptance of things like slavery and the subordination of women. That’s not uniform, of course. There are also texts that proclaim the equality of men and women and forbid a Christian from having a Christian slave and so forth, but it’s all there, including mistaken notions about how the second coming will be soon. We would escape a whole bunch of problems if only we all knew that and weren’t alarmed by it. The whole Genesis versus evolution controversy. For me, it’s not that the first chapters of Genesis are wrong, but they’re not meant to be taken literally. So, also the issue of whether women are supposed to be subordinate to men. That issue disappears if people are willing to say, “sometimes the Bible is wrong.” So also with the texts that are quoted in opposition to same-sex behaviour. Those passages, and there

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<sup>5</sup> Kate Cooper is Professor of Ancient History in the University of Manchester. She writes and teaches about the world of the Mediterranean in the Roman period, with a special interest in daily life and the family, religion and gender, social identity, and the fall of the Roman Empire.

aren't many, tell us what some of our spiritual ancestors thought and clearly they were wrong about that. So many conflicts in the church could be either resolved or handled in a very different way if only we didn't have this uncritical reverence for the Bible.

We rightly abandoned Christian legitimizing of slavery about 150 years ago, Christian legitimizing of sexism in the last 30 to 40 years, [and the] Christian legitimizing of heterosexism more recently. Modern Christians are now trying to heal the wounds of the past through spreading anti-racism, equality among genders, men and women, goodwill and mutual understanding.

## **The Corinthian Chronicles**

### **Background**

During Paul's stay in Ephesus he maintained relations with the churches of Achaia that he had founded on the preceding journey. The church at Corinth was a vexing problem to him because of its instability. Since it was largely composed of Gentiles who had no training in the Old Testament Scriptures, and whose religious and moral antecedents were the exact opposite of Christian principle, much teaching was required to bring them to spiritual maturity (1 Cor. 3:1-3).

The ministry of Apollos among them was helpful in many ways. He attracted many of the Corinthians by his learning and his polished presentation of truth. He was especially effective in dealing with Jews, since he knew the Old Testament well and could argue publicly in convincing fashion (Acts 18:27-28). Paul appreciated his ministry and commended him (I Cor. 16:12).

It is possible that Peter visited Corinth, although no detail is given concerning his work. Paul mentioned his name as known to the Corinthians (1:12) and implied that he also was engaged in itinerant preaching (9:5). It is scarcely probable that a certain faction in the Corinthian church would claim him as their champion had there not been some contact with him personally at that time.

### **The "Lost Letter"**

While Apollos and possibly Cephas were visiting Corinth and preaching there, Paul was on the tour that took him back to Palestine and thence to Ephesus. During this period, or shortly after his return to Ephesus, he wrote a letter to which he alluded in I Corinthians 5:9: "I wrote unto you in my epistle to have no company with fornicators. . . ." The moral atmosphere of Corinth was such that absolute separation from evil was necessary if the church was to survive. Evidently there had been some misunderstanding of his injunction, for in I

Corinthians he explained that he was not advocating withdrawal from the world, but that there should be separation from professing Christians who persisted in this sin.

The full content of the previous letter will never be known, since it has been lost. An ingenious hypothesis has been offered that fragments of this "lost letter" were preserved in the manuscript collection at Corinth, and that I Corinthians 6:12-20 and II Corinthians 6:14-7:1 are parts of it that were incorporated into the body of the later epistles.<sup>6</sup> The hypothesis rests solely on subjective impression, and however plausible it may seem, there is no good external evidence to support it. It is certain that the problem of moral purity was of supreme importance at Corinth, as it was elsewhere throughout the Gentile world, and that it was one of the earliest issues with which Paul had to deal.

## **1 Corinthians**

### **Date**

The response to the first letter was quite unsatisfactory. Apollos and Cephas had moved to other fields, and the church, bereft of adequate leadership, had fallen into confusion. Disquieting rumours concerning it began to drift back to Ephesus through slaves of a Corinthian family who were in Ephesus on business. Finally three members of the church, Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus, brought a contribution to Paul and also a letter containing certain questions that the Corinthians wanted clarified. In response Paul wrote I Corinthians. It was composed near the end of his sojourn at Ephesus, for he had already formulated his plans for leaving Asia and for making an extended visit to Macedonia and Achaia (I Cor. 16:57). It must have been composed during the winter or in the fall, for he spoke of staying at Ephesus until Pentecost because of the success that was attending his work (16:8). He was engaged in raising the contribution for the poor in Jerusalem, which he took with him on his last journey to that city (Acts 24:17), so that he contemplated returning to Palestine again in the near future. Probably it was written in the winter of A.D. 55, during the peak of his work at Ephesus.

### **Content**

First Corinthians is the most varied in content and style of all the epistles of Paul. The topics discussed range from schism to finance and from church decorum to the resurrection. Every literary device known to writing is employed

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<sup>6</sup> See David Smith, *Life and Letters of St. Paul* (New York: George H. Doran Company, n.d.), Appendix I, p. 654.

in its pages: logic, sarcasm, entreaty, scolding, poetry, narration, exposition—in short, it is written in the same style as Paul would have carried on in a conversation with the elders of Corinth had he been present with them. It is thoroughly informal in its approach rather than being a set essay on theological subjects. There is, however, a central theme. Findlay has called it "the doctrine of the cross in its social application." It reflects the conflict that took place when Christian experience and Christian ideals of conduct came into conflict with the concepts and practices of the pagan world. The problems discussed in it are by no means outdated, for they are still to be found wherever Christians come into contact with a pagan civilization.

## Outline

### I Corinthians: The Problems at Corinth

I. Salutation	1:1-9
II. Reply to report from "house of Chloe"	1:10-6:20
Party Strife	1:10-3:23
Defence of Paul's Ministry	4:1-4
Criticism of Immortality	5:1-13
Criticism of Lawsuits	6:1-11
Reply to Libertinism	6:12-20
III. Reply to Questions in Letter	7:1-16:9
Marriage	7:1-24
Virgins	7:25-40
Things Sacrificed to Idols	8:1-11:1
Evaluated by the idol	8:1-13
Evaluated by freedom	9:1-27
Evaluated by relation to God	10:1-22
Evaluated by relation to others	10:23-11:1
Problems of Worship	11:2-34
The covering of the head	11:2-16
The Lord's Table	11:17-34
Spiritual Gifts	12:1-14:40
The Resurrection of the Body	15:1-58
The Collection	16:1-9
IV. Concluding Salutations	16:10-24

The structure of I Corinthians depends on the order of topics that had been brought to Paul's attention by the visitors from Corinth and by the letter the Corinthians had written. How much news had been imparted by Apollos and by the trio who brought the contribution is not told. He made direct reference to "them *that are of the household of Chloe*" (1:11) who had informed him of the



parties that had grown up within the church and of the immorality and litigation that disturbed their peace. These topics he discussed at length in the first six chapters. Beginning with the seventh chapter a new phrase appears: "Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote . . ." (7:1), and its subsequent repetitions (7:25; 8:1; [11:2]; 12:1; [15:1]; 16:1) mark off the subdivisions of his reply to their written questions.

## **Evaluation**

First Corinthians affords a better insight into the problems of a pioneer church than almost any other writing in the New Testament. Each problem was met by applying a spiritual principle rather than by recommending a psychological expedient. For schism, the remedy is spiritual maturity (3:1-9); for fornication, church discipline until the offender repents and is restored (5:1-5); for litigation, arbitration within the Christian community (6:1-6). In the case of marriage between a believer and an unbeliever, the concern of the believer is to save the unbeliever, not to alienate him or her (7:16); for the problem of the unmarried virgins, self-control or lawful marriage (7:36-37). In the casuistic questions of food offered to idols and of details of worship, the relation of the believer to God is the deciding factor (10:31; 11:13, 32). Similarly the gifts are administered by God (12:28) within the church.

First Corinthians contains some allusions to church life and practice that are puzzling to modern Christians. The status of "virgins" in chapter 7, where the word "daughter" (7:36-38) does not occur in the original text, the "delivering unto Satan" (5:5) in church discipline, and baptism for the dead (15:29) are usages for which no explanation is given, although they were evidently well known to Paul and his readers. Their mention does not mean that they were widely practiced. Baptism for the dead, too, may have been a local custom in the Corinthian church that was not necessarily approved, but that was used by Paul as a practical point of appeal in his argument for the resurrection.

First Corinthians was dispatched to its destination by Timothy (16:10). Paul had tried to persuade Apollos to undertake the task of straightening out the church's problems, but he declined. Perhaps he thought that his presence could only increase the schismatic tendency among the followers. Paul had some misgivings concerning Timothy's effectiveness, for he urged the Corinthians not to frighten him or despise him (16:10-11).

Nothing is said concerning the outcome of Timothy's mission, but it seems to have been a failure. In II Corinthians Paul spoke twice of his plans and said, "This is the third time I am ready to come to you" (II Cor. 12:14; 13:1). Since his first visit to Corinth was the founding of the church, and since his letter was written from Macedonia after leaving Ephesus where he was waiting to come to

Corinth, there must have been an unrecorded visit somewhere between Timothy's visit and Paul's departure from Asia. Such a call need not have occupied any great length of time, for transit from Ephesus to Corinth could be made easily. Luke does not record any such trip in Acts, but neither does he record many other episodes that might have been equally interesting or important. A survey of II Corinthians will show that Paul doubtless did go to Corinth to attempt to accomplish what Timothy had not been able to do, and that while there he had been grossly insulted and his counsel had been rejected. Rival self-styled "apostles," who drew their support from the churches and who boasted of their Jewish ancestry and of their activity as ministers of Christ, had invaded Corinth and belittled Paul to the church (see II Cor. 10-11). Furthermore, the offending members of the church had been decidedly unrepentant (12:21). The situation was tense.

Paul decided that he would not return to Corinth until the church adopted a different attitude (1:23). He had hoped that he might raise some money in Achaia for the Jerusalem collection. In anticipation of carrying through the original plan of a final visit to Macedonia and Achaia, he sent Titus ahead to deal with the church, while he closed the work at Ephesus and went to Troas en route westward.

Perhaps Paul wrote once again to Corinth at this time. There has been some speculation as to whether II Corinthians represents one epistle or two. In II Corinthians 2:4 Paul spoke of a previous letter that he wrote "with many tears," and that was intended to convince the Corinthians of his love for them. I Corinthians does not seem to fit the description, and II Corinthians as it stands was written subsequently. A number of scholars have suggested that II Corinthians 10 through 13 may be a third epistle, written between I Corinthians and II Corinthians 1 through 9, which Paul wrote to defend himself and which he sent to the church by the hand of Titus (II Cor. 7:8-13).<sup>5</sup> Others have contended that the intermediary severe letter was lost.<sup>6</sup> As in the case of the first letter, there is no satisfactory external evidence for partitioning II Corinthians. Every manuscript of the Pauline epistles contains it as it is, so that its integrity cannot be challenged on grounds of manuscript variation. If chapters 10 through 13 do represent a third epistle, while chapters 1 through 9 represent a fourth, there is no trace of original separation in the manuscript tradition.

When Paul reached Troas after leaving Ephesus, he looked eagerly for Titus, but Titus did not appear (2:12-13). Paul, oppressed with worry over what might have happened at Corinth, went across to Macedonia, where his troubles multiplied (7:5). While he was labouring there and arranging with the Macedonian churches for their gifts to Jerusalem, Titus suddenly arrived with the good news that a revival had broken out in the Corinthian church and that

its attitude had changed from one of carelessness and obstinacy to one of repentance. With joy Paul sat down and penned II Corinthians as a preparation for a third visit that he hoped would have only happy consequences. If the whole epistle were written at this time, he included a lengthy defense of his ministry (2:14 to 7:4) and the financial request for the Corinthians and their colleagues of Achaia to match the Macedonian contributions to Jerusalem (chaps. 8-9).

## **2 Corinthians**

### **Content**

The content has already been discussed to some extent. The epistle differs from I Corinthians in dealing with personal matters rather than with doctrinal teaching or ecclesiastical order. The human Paul is much in evidence: his feelings, desires, dislikes, ambitions, and obligations are all spread before his readers. This epistle contains less systematic teaching and more expression of personal feeling than even I Corinthians, and its structure is not as clear-cut as is that of the former epistle.

### **II Corinthians: The Epistle of Paul's Ministry**

I. Salutation	1:1-2
II. Explanation of Personal Conduct	1:3-2:13
III. The defence of the Ministry	2:14-7:4
The Nature of the Ministry	2:14-3:18
The Sincerity of the Ministry	4:1-6
The Perseverance of the Ministry	4:7-15
The Prospect of the Ministry	4:16-5:10
The Sanctions of the Ministry	5:11-19
The Example of the Ministry	5:20-6:10
The Appeal of the Ministry	6:11-7:4
IV. Comments on Effects of Letter	7:5-16
V. The Grace of Giving	8:1-9:15
VI. Personal defence	10:1-12:13
VII. Preparation for Visit	12:14-13:10
VIII. Concluding Salutation	11:11-14

### **Evaluation**

Second Corinthians affords an insight into the career of Paul that none of the other epistles gives. It was written not only to defend him against the occasional criticisms of the Corinthian church, but also against the slanders and accusations

that his enemies raised against him wherever he was preaching. The controversy that began in Galatia had created a powerful group of Judaizing opponents, who did not scruple to use any methods, fair or foul, in order to discredit him. Not only did he have to contend with the spiritual inertia and the evils of traditional paganism, but he also had to face the active malice of jealous and prejudiced leaders who professed to be Christians.

The accusations brought by his opponents were numerous. They charged him with walking "according to the flesh" (10:2). They said that he was a coward, for he wrote letters that resounded like thunder but in actual presence he was about as authoritative as a mouse (10:10). He did not maintain himself in dignity by taking support from the churches, but demeaned himself by working (11:7). They claimed that he was not one of the original apostles, and so was not qualified to teach (11:5; 12:11-12), and that he had no credentials that he could show (3:1). They attacked his personal character by saying that he was fleshly (10:2), boastful (10:8, 15), and deceitful (12:16), and they insinuated that he embezzled the funds that were being entrusted to him (8:20-23).

The accusers themselves were apparently Jews (11:22) who were "ministers of Christ" (11:23) and who, by means of the clever use of recommendations from other churches (3:1), had obtained entrance into the Pauline churches. Doubtless they were responsible for some of the schism in Corinth. They were haughty and domineering (11:19-20), but were not ready to do pioneering work or to suffer for Christ (11:23ff. ). They were, in short, "false brethren."

This picture, drawn by inference from the language of Paul, shows that the church of the apostolic age had its struggles and its sins. The marvel is not that it was imperfect; the marvel is that it survived. Only a divine dynamic could have given enduring vitality to so weak and sensual a group as the Corinthian church. The positive teaching of the epistle makes it one of the most valuable in the New Testament. Its picture of the ministry, its statement of the prospects beyond death (chap. 5), and its teaching on giving (chaps. 8-9) are all outstanding passages.

### **The Last Visit to Corinth**

The arrival of Titus in Macedonia with the reassuring word of a change in the attitude of the Corinthian church (II Cor. 7:6-16) enabled Paul to pursue his journey without fear. Luke simply says that he spent three months in Achaia, but gives no details. In the spring of A.D. 56 he made plans to return to Jerusalem with the offering, when he learned that a plot against his life had been hatched by his Jewish enemies (Acts 20:3). Realizing that they would easily do away with him on shipboard, he dispatched his companions to Troas, while he, in company with Luke, went north to Philippi by the land route, and then sailed for

Troas just after the close of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which came immediately after the Passover. The way in which the "we" section reappears at this point in Acts (20:5-6) indicates that Luke had been traveling with Paul in Achaia. It is suggested following an ancient tradition, that perhaps Luke is identical with "the broacher whose praise in the gospel is *spread* through all the churches; and . . . who was also appointed by the churches to travel with us in *the* matter of this grace" (II Cor. 8:18-19). No name is mentioned, and the anonymous person could be any one of the companions of Paul listed in Acts 20:4. On the other hand, the definite article when used with terms denoting members of a family may be translated as a possessive pronoun. If Titus and Luke were brothers, the early connection of both of them with Antioch and the silence concerning both in the book of Acts could be explained more easily. At any rate, Luke at this time was Paul's active helper in the campaign throughout Macedonia and Achaia, and he became Paul's closest associate in the years of imprisonment that followed.

### **The Projected Mission**

Paul had planned the return to Jerusalem to be only an interlude in a larger mission. Already he had his eyes on a grander goal than any of the cities that he had evangelized previously. Rome beckoned him, for he was a citizen of the empire. If he could reach Rome with the gospel, it could easily be disseminated to all parts of the empire, for all roads led to Rome.

With true missionary statesmanship he laid out his course of action. Luke says that "after these things were ended [the ministry at Ephesus], Paul purposed in the spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome" (Acts 19:21).

### **The Non-Canonical Third Letter to the Corinthians<sup>7</sup>**

(For information only)

The letter traditionally called "3 Corinthians" is a pseudonymous reply of "Paul" to a letter from the Christians in Corinth, sent to him while he was in prison in Philippi. Both letters eventually came to be incorporated in the apocryphal Acts of Paul (see above). In some parts of the Christian church for example, in Armenia-3 Corinthians was accepted as canonical Scripture.

The letter from the Corinthians asks for Paul's advice about the teaching of two heretics, Simon (Magus?) and Cleobius, who maintain, among other things, that

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<sup>7</sup> "Lost Scriptures" (Books that did not make it in the New Testament), by Bart D. Ehrman (Author of Lost Christianities) (Oxford University Press)

(a) God was not the creator, (b) the Jewish prophets were not from God, (c) Jesus did not come in the flesh, and (d) the flesh will not be raised. All of these are clearly Gnostic ideas.' The pseudonymous author of 3 Corinthians replies by refuting each of them in turn. In particular, he wants to stress the proto-orthodox doctrine that the flesh was created by God and that it will be redeemed, as evident in the resurrection of Jesus himself in the flesh. The letter concludes with dire warnings of eternal torment for those who embrace the heretical teachings of Paul's opponents.

Most scholars now think that these letters were originally composed and transmitted independently of the Acts of Paul and were then at a later time incorporated in the longer narrative. If so, they may well have been in circulation already by the middle of the second century.

### **The Letter of the Corinthians to Paul**

Stephanus and the Presbyters with him, Daphnus, Euboulus, Theophilus, and Zenon, to Paul, who is in the Lord. Greetings!

Two men, a certain Simon and Cleobius, have come to Corinth and upset the faith of some by their corrupt teachings, which you can evaluate for yourself. For we have never heard such teachings either from you or anyone else. But we have kept the things we received from you and our other teachers. And so, since the Lord has shown us mercy, come to us while you are in the flesh, or write back to us, that we may hear your teachings again. For we believe what was revealed to Theonoe, that the Lord has saved you from the hand of the Lawless one.

For this is what they are saying and teaching: that there is no need to consider the [Hebrew] prophets; that God is not the Almighty; that there is no resurrection of the flesh; that humans are not God's creation; that the Lord did not come (into the world) in the flesh; that he was not born from Mary; and that the world did not come from God but from angels.

For this reason, brother, make all haste to come, that the Corinthian church may continue to have no cause of stumbling and that the foolishness of these men may be made clean

Farewell in the Lord.

### **The Letter of Paul to the Corinthians Concerning the Flesh**

Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ and who is in the midst of many failures, to the brothers in Corinth. Greetings!



I am not surprised that the doctrines of the evil one have moved forward so quickly; for the Lord Christ will soon come—he who is rejected by those who have debased his sayings. For in the beginning I delivered over to you the teachings I received from the apostles who were before me, who spent their entire time with Jesus Christ: that our Lord Christ Jesus was born from Mary, from the seed of David, when the Holy Spirit was sent from heaven into her by the Father, that he might come into the world and set free all flesh through his flesh, and might raise us from the dead as fleshly beings, just as he showed himself as a model; and that humans were formed by his Father. For this reason they were sought out by him while they were perishing, that he might make them live through their adoption as God's children.

For God who is over all, the Almighty, the one who made heaven and earth, sent prophets to the Jews first of all, that they might be pulled away from their sins. For he wanted to save the house of Israel. And so he sent a portion of the Spirit of Christ into the prophets, who proclaimed the true worship of God for many years. For the unrighteous ruler who wanted to be God laid hands on them and delivered all human flesh to the bondage of pleasure.

But since God the Almighty was righteous, and did not wish to abandon his own creation, he sent down the Spirit through fire into Mary the Galilean, that the evil one might be defeated through that same perishing flesh that he used in his dealings with others. In this way he would convincingly be shown not to be God. For by his own body Christ Jesus saved all flesh, that he might show forth a temple of righteousness by his own body, by which we have been set free. Those others, therefore, are not children of righteousness but children of wrath; they try to restrain God's foreknowledge by saying that heaven and earth and all that is in them is not the work of the Father. They have the cursed faith of the serpent. Reject such people and flee from their teaching.

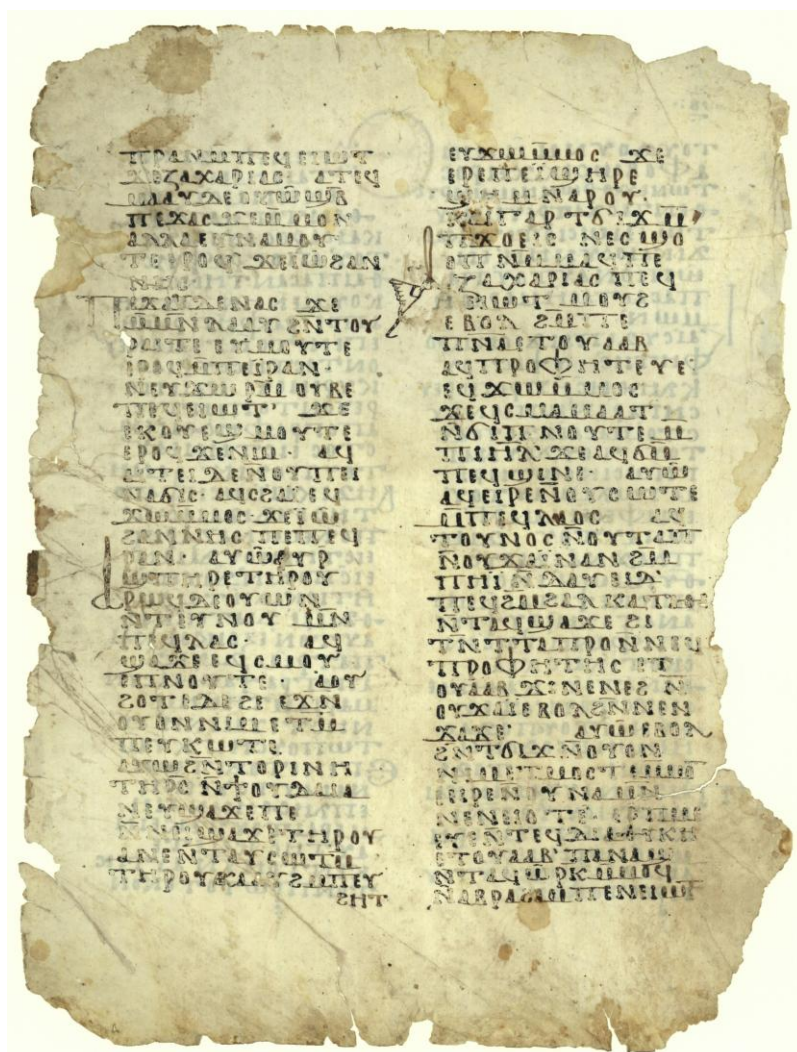
There is no resurrection for those who tell you there is no resurrection of the flesh, who deny, in fact, the one who is risen. For they do not know, O men of Corinth, about the sowing of wheat or other seed, that it is cast naked on the earth and after it disintegrates in the depths it is raised by the will of God, in a body and fully clothed, so that not only is the body that is cast down raised up, but it is multiplied, erect, and blessed.

And if we are not to make a parable out of the seed, you should know that Jonah, the son of Amathias, when he refused to preach in Nineveh, was swallowed by a huge fish. After three days and nights God heard Jonah praying from the depths of Hades—and not a bit of him was corrupted, not even a hair or an eyelash. How much more will he raise you who believe in Christ Jesus, just as he himself was raised, O you of little faith!

And if a corpse was cast onto the bones of the prophet Elisha by the sons of Israel, and was then raised up in the body what about you? When the body, bones, and spirit of Christ have been cast upon you in that last day, will you not be raised with flesh intact?

If anyone accepts some other teaching, let him not cause me trouble. For I have chains on my hands that I may gain Christ, and marks on my body that I may come to the resurrection of the dead. Anyone who remains in the rule received through the blessed prophets and the holy Gospel will receive a reward. Anyone who transgresses these things is bound for the fire, as are those atheists who have come before them—offspring of vipers, whom you should reject by the power of the Lord.

May peace be with you.



*More than forty Greek-Coptic diglot manuscripts of the New Testament have survived to the present day.*



*Apollo, patron of the arts, divination  
and medicine*



*Mosaic of the god Dionysus,  
Greek god of wine and liberation,  
and centre of an important  
mystery religion*

# Letters to the Corinthians 1 and 2 Commented

## 1 Corinthians 1: 1-31

### 1. Christ the basis of unity

#### Verses 1 – 9. The pre-eminence of Christ

Paul identified himself as having been “called” to be an apostle of Christ Jesus “through God’s will,” thus indicating that his authority as an apostle came from God as an expression of his unmerited favour. At the time, Sosthenes was with him and, therefore, he associated him with himself at the outset of the letter. The name “Sosthenes” does not appear to have been common. This may lend weight to the possibility that he is the same person as the synagogue official in Corinth who was submitted to a beating in the presence of Gallio and thereafter became

a believer. Paul called Sosthenes “the brother,” one whom the Corinthians knew. (1:1)

The community of believers in Corinth belonged to God, for he had purchased it with the blood of his beloved Son. (Compare Acts 20:28.) As God’s congregation, the members thereof were “sanctified in Christ Jesus.” Through their faith in the Son of God, they came to be part of his body and were sanctified or set apart as holy to do his Father’s will. They were called to be “holy ones” or God’s cleansed people. They shared this “holy” or pure standing with all others who “called upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” To call upon his name signifies to acknowledge him as Lord, acting in harmony with his example and teaching. “In every place, theirs and ours,” would be wherever communities of believers existed and acknowledged God’s Son as their Lord. (1:2)

“Ours” could refer to places where Paul had ministered, and “theirs” to locations other than those where he had served. Another possibility is that the words “theirs and ours” may mean “their Lord and ours.” Numerous translations have added “Lord” in their renderings, thereby making this meaning explicit. (1:2; see the Notes section.)

“Favour,” unmerited or unearned kindness, or grace would include all the help and guidance the Father and his Son would provide. For believers to enjoy the peace of which God and Christ are the source would mean their being in possession of inner tranquillity. Their sense of well-being and security would stem from knowing that as beloved children of God and brothers of Christ they would be sustained and strengthened in times of trial and affliction. (1:3)

In view of the gracious divine favour (including the gifts that existed within the community of believers) that had been granted to them, Paul was moved always to thank God for the Corinthians. According to numerous manuscripts, the apostle said, “my God,” which would have reflected his personal relationship with him. The divine favour had been given to the Corinthian believers “in Christ Jesus,” having come into their possession because of being at one with him on the basis of their faith in him and what he accomplished through his sacrificial death. (1:4)

“In him,” or as members of his body attached to him as the head, the Corinthian believers had been enriched in every way, “in all word and all knowledge.” Their enrichment in “word” appears to refer to their ability to express the message about the Son of God. Because of having come to know all the

essentials about his example and teaching, they were also enriched in knowledge. They were fully acquainted with the glad tidings about him. (1:5)

The “testimony of Christ” had been firmly established or confirmed among the Corinthian believers. This may refer to the miracles or deeds that revealed the working of divine power, serving to verify the truthfulness of the message about the Son of God. (1:6)

Through the operation of God's spirit, various miraculous gifts had been imparted to the individual disciples of Christ. As a community of believers, the Corinthians were not lacking in any essential gifts. In keeping with what they had learned about Christ, they were waiting for his revelation or his return in glory. Approved believers would then be united with him and, in the ultimate sense, begin enjoying their status as God's children. (1:7)

Paul expressed confidence that the Father, the one to whom he continued to offer thanks for the Corinthian believers, would keep them firm or strengthen them to the end. The Father's safekeeping assured the Corinthian believers that they would be found blameless or fully approved “in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.” That “day” refers to his revelation or his return in glory. (1:8)

The apostle could express himself with such confidence because “God is faithful,” dependable, or trustworthy. He had called the Corinthian believers into fellowship with his Son and, therefore, would aid them to live in keeping with the purpose for which he had called them. (1:9)

### **Verses 10-17. The presence of factions**

Addressing the Corinthians as “brothers” or fellow children of God, Paul admonished them by “the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” or on the basis of the authority Christ had granted him. The apostle urged all of them to “speak the same” or to be united in their profession of faith and not to have any divisions among them. All of them should have as their aim to be of the same mind and the same thought or purpose. (1:10)

Disturbing reports about the existence of strife among his “brothers” or fellow believers in Corinth had reached Paul from persons associated with Chloe. The ones who brought the report were either servants or other members of her household. Possibly Chloe was a woman of some means and, like Lydia in Philippi, engaged in commercial business. (1:11)

Divisiveness had developed because the Corinthians identified themselves with certain ones as leaders. Individually, they would say, “I am of Paul, but I am of



Apollos, but I am of Cephas [Peter], but I am of Christ.” Whereas Paul and Apollos had been in Corinth, it is not known whether Peter ever passed through the city. If Peter did visit Corinth, this could explain why some of the Corinthians would identify themselves as belonging to him. Another possibility may be that certain believers had met Peter elsewhere and, on account of his close personal association with Jesus, chose to identify themselves with him. In view of his mentioning himself, Apollos, and Peter as examples of those who were being looked to in a manner that resulted in factions, Paul’s reference to those who said, “I am of Christ,” may also have been in a manner that contributed to quarrelling. (1:12)

Disavowing the factious spirit that resulted from looking to certain men, Paul said, “Has the Christ been divided?” The implied answer is an emphatic “no.” Many manuscript readings would allow for rendering the words as a statement (“The Christ has been divided”), which would mean that the existing factions in the community of believers or the body of Christ caused Christ to be divided, for he is the head of the body. The apostle then raised other rhetorical questions that called for a “no” answer, “Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?” (1:13)

He was grateful (“to God,” according to numerous manuscripts) that he had not baptized anyone other than Crispus and Gaius. As the reason for his gratitude, Paul added, “so that no one can say that you were baptized in my name.” No general claim would have been justified that Corinthian believers had been immersed in the name of Paul and thereby acknowledged him as their leader to whom they came to belong. (1:14, 15)

After having mentioned Crispus and Gaius, the apostle appears to have recalled that he also baptized the household of Stephanas, but he had no recollection of having baptized anyone else. Christ’s purpose in sending him or commissioning him as an apostle had been for him to proclaim the good news. He had no special commission to do baptizing (as did John the Baptist). The fact that the apostle stressed that Jesus Christ had not sent him to do baptizing may indicate that certain ones, in an inordinate manner, looked to those who had immersed them, which action marked their entrance into the community of believers. (1:16, 17)

### **Verses 18-31. The corrective of the cross**

Furthermore, Paul having been sent did not serve to demonstrate “wisdom of word,” which may mean the human wisdom associated with eloquent speaking and impressive reasoning. In view of the absence of the persuasive power



stemming from extraordinary speaking and reasoning ability, the death of Christ and the reason for it were revealed to the fullest extent. Thus the “cross [*staurós*] of Christ” was not emptied. The reference to the implement on which Christ died is representative of all that he accomplished through his sacrificial death, and nothing in Paul’s ministry diminished the power that this historical event had on all who responded to it in faith. (1:17)

To those who were perishing because of their persisting in unbelief, the “word of the cross” (the message about Jesus’ death and its significance) appeared to be foolishness. They could not comprehend how there could be any benefit resulting to them from one who died an ignominious death like that of a vile criminal. For those who responded in faith and thus were saved or delivered from God’s condemnation of the world of mankind that remained in a state of alienation from and enmity with him, the “word of the cross” proved to be God’s power. The message regarding Jesus’ death and what it accomplished has a powerful effect on all who embrace it, revealing to them both the seriousness of sin and the depth of God’s love for humans in a way that no other arrangement could have achieved. The nature of Jesus’ death exposed the seriousness of sin. As God’s provision for humans to be forgiven of their sins and to be reconciled to him as his approved children, Jesus’ death demonstrated the greatness of divine love. (1:18)

Paul appropriated the words of Isaiah 29:14 (LXX) to show that evaluation of God’s activity or purpose on the basis of human wisdom would lead to the wrong conclusion, which would explain why the unbelievers would consider the “word of the cross” to be foolish. “For it is written,” said the apostle, “I [YHWH] will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and I will reject the intelligence of the intelligent ones.” (1:19)

Paul then raised a number of rhetorical questions. “Where [is the] wise one? Where [is the] scribe? Where [is the] debater of this age?” When referring to the “wise one,” Paul may have thought of the Greeks, with their pride in philosophy (“love of wisdom”). Possibly he particularly meant the Jewish scribes when mentioning the “scribe.” The “debater” could include any lover of disputes among both Jews and Greeks. In view of the absence of punctuation in the original Greek text, the phrase, “of this age,” could also modify “wise one” and “scribe,” not necessarily being restricted to “debater.” The expression “this age” may be understood to mean the then-existing Greco-Roman world. In relation to what God had accomplished through his Son, there was no one among the world’s wise ones, scribes, or debaters who could comprehend the divine arrangement for forgiveness of sins or come to any sound conclusion regarding it. Appropriately, in view of the ignorant state in which God had left them, Paul

raised the rhetorical question, “Did not God make the wisdom of the world foolish?” (1:20)

Through the “wisdom” existing in the world of mankind alienated from God, no one could come to know him. In his wisdom, he had purposed that this would be the case. Therefore, he was well-pleased to save from condemnation those who would believe, doing so through the “foolishness” (from the world’s standpoint) of the proclamation (regarding the death of his Son and what it accomplished). (1:21; see the Notes section.)

For their part, the Jews demanded “signs” as a condition for believing. On the basis of Daniel 7:13, they expected the promised Messiah to come with the clouds of heaven. For this reason, they repeatedly asked Jesus for a heavenly “sign.” The Greeks desired “wisdom,” wanting proofs that were set forth with eloquent and impressive reasoning. (1:22)

Either using the first person editorial plural or meaning to include his close associates, Paul indicated that he did not accommodate the demand for “signs” and the desire for “wisdom.” “But we preach Christ crucified.” For the Jews, this proved to be a cause for stumbling, for it did not fit their expectation of a conquering Messiah who would liberate them from the Roman yoke. As for the non-Jewish people, they could not imagine that benefits could come to them through a man who was executed like the worst kind of criminal. The message about “Christ crucified” sounded foolish to them. (1:23)

To the “called ones,” both Jews and Greek (non-Jews) who responded to God’s call or invitation to be reconciled to him as his beloved children, Christ proved to be “the power of God and the wisdom of God.” Christ’s sacrificial death was the means God used to effect liberation from sin and condemnation, a liberation that no human power could have brought about. Thus, by what he accomplished, Christ manifested the incomparable divine power. The arrangement for being forgiven of sin and being reconciled to God gave evidence of surpassing wisdom. It made it possible for responsive humans to recognize the seriousness of sin and the greatness of God’s love. So, in his own person and by his willing surrender of his life, Christ displayed his Father’s wisdom. No other provision for forgiveness of sins could have stirred the inmost selves of believers as intensely as the awareness that the Son of God died for them and that his Father had sent him to the world for this purpose. The transcendent love of the Son in surrendering his life and that of the Father in giving his Son for humans in a state of alienation from him cannot fully be fathomed, for nothing in the human sphere is even remotely comparable. (1:24)

Whereas the message about “Christ crucified” appears as “foolishness” to unbelieving humans, this “foolishness of God” is “wiser than men,” for humans, regardless of how wise they may be, are incapable of devising a means to free themselves from sin and its consequences. In the eyes of unbelieving humans, “Christ crucified” would be “weakness” or a “weak thing,” for they could not imagine that the greatest possible good would result there from. The “weakness of God,” however, is “stronger than men,” for humans are powerless when it comes to effecting freedom from sin. (1:25)

Within the community of “brothers” or fellow believers, the Corinthians could see that, “according to the flesh” or according to human evaluation, not many of them were wise, powerful, or of noble birth. For the most part, they were persons of much lower social standing, including slaves. (1:26)

The upper classes of society would have looked down upon them as foolish and weak, persons of little account. God, though, had chosen what is regarded as foolish in the world of mankind to shame the wise ones and what is thought of as weak to shame the strong. To accomplish his purpose, God did not need the wise and the powerful. He did not seek their support, for they were of no special value to him. As individuals who were of no use to him in their state of unbelief, he put them to shame. (1:27)

Instead of soliciting the cooperation of the wise and influential ones of the world, God chose the ignoble, the despised, or the nothings or little nobodies as his people to advance his cause. This served to reduce to nothing “the things that are,” revealing that the unbelieving somebodies were of no value to him. (1:28) As a result, “no flesh,” or no human, had any basis for boasting in the sight of God. No one had anything to offer that God specifically needed to carry out his purpose. (1:29)

It was not on the basis of any personal merit that believers had come to be “in Christ,” at one with him as members of his body. God is the one who made this possible. As Paul expressed it, “Out of him, however, you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, that, as it is written, ‘Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.’” (1:30, 31)

In the world, the Corinthian believers had mostly been nobodies or nothings. On account of what God had done for them, they enjoyed the dignified standing of his beloved children. Christ was “wisdom from God” for them, providing them with everything they needed to conduct themselves in keeping with their new life as members of his body. On account of their faith in him, they came into

possession of his righteousness as persons forgiven of their sins and divinely approved. Through him and what he accomplished through his death, they were sanctified or set apart for his Father as holy or as his clean people. They were also redeemed, or set free from the condemnation of sin, and were awaiting the full redemption, which would be accomplished at the time of their being united to Christ in the sinless state. (1:30)

With all boasting on the basis of personal standing, achievement, or merit being ruled out, believers give credit to God and Christ for everything. Their new life is owing to them, and so they live for God and Christ. Any boasting rightly is “in the Lord.” Paul quoted the thought (not the exact words) expressed in Jeremiah 9:24, where the reference is to boasting in knowing YHWH or having a relationship with him. Accordingly, the boasting “in the Lord” could refer to boasting in the Father, the source of the life “in Christ.” It may be, though, that Paul meant the Lord Jesus Christ, for he is wisdom from God, and righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. (1:31)

### **Notes:**

In 1 Corinthians 1:1, the Greek word for “called” is missing in a number of manuscripts, including fifth-century Codex Alexandrinus.

In translations that add “Lord” after “their” in 1 Corinthians 1:2, a common rendering is, “all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours.” (NRSV) When the expression “theirs and ours” is understood to refer to “every place,” the phrase can be translated, “all those who in every place, theirs and ours, call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” This is the basic alternate rendering found in a footnote of the *New Jerusalem Bible* and in the main text of a number of German translations, including the 1984 revision of Luther’s translation.

The Greek word *staurós* (in 1 Corinthians 1:17, 18), commonly translated “cross,” does not in itself designate a long stake with a transverse beam but can denote a stake or pole. The *staurós* that Jesus and thereafter Simon carried was a beam, for a cross would have been too heavy for one man to carry or to drag. The Latin term *crux*, from which the English word “cross” is derived, can designate a tree or a wooden instrument on which victims were either hanged or impaled.

In the allegorical Epistle of Barnabas (thought to date from the early second century and so from a time when the Romans continued to practice crucifixion), the *staurós* is linked to the letter tau (T). Moreover, very limited archaeological

evidence does indicate that the Romans did make use of upright poles with a transverse beam. There does not seem to have been a standard way in which the Romans carried out crucifixions. According to the first-century Jewish historian Josephus (*War*, V, xi, 1), the soldiers, out of wrath and hatred for the Jews, nailed those they caught, one in one way, and another in another way.

It is commonly believed that upright stakes were already at Golgotha or that the beams that had been carried to the site were attached to three adjacent trees (or possibly even the same tree) there. The minority view (expressed, for example, in Vine's *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*) is that Jesus was nailed in an upright position to the pole that Simon had carried and that it was not used as a transverse beam.

In 1 Corinthians 1:19, the wording of the quotation from Isaiah 29:14 is nearly identical to that of the extant Septuagint text. Instead of a form of the word for "reject," "refuse," "turn aside," "disregard," "void," or "break" (*athetéo*), the Septuagint uses a form of the word for "hide" (*krypto*), as also do the Masoretic Text and the Dead Sea Scroll of Isaiah.

In the time of Isaiah, the Israelites concluded that their outward worship, though lacking in genuine devotion, merited YHWH's favourable attention. Through Isaiah, YHWH exposed their wrong view, letting them know that he would act in a manner that would cause wonderment, amazement, or astonishment. This would be by withdrawing his blessing, favour, and protection. In the face of the resulting disaster, the wise ones among the people would be unable to formulate a plan to deal with the distressing situation. Their wisdom would be destroyed, for YHWH would not aid them to see a way out and would leave them in a confused state. The intelligent ones among the Israelites would have nothing to offer. It would be as if YHWH had hidden their intelligence or understanding so that it could not be found.

Although Paul quoted from Isaiah 29:14 without making a contextual application, he used the words in a manner that harmonized with the message they conveyed.

Literally translated, 1 Corinthians 1:21 reads, "For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through [its] wisdom, God thought well to save the believers through the foolishness of the proclamation." In relation to not knowing God, the expression "in the wisdom of God" has been understood in two basic ways. (1) In his wisdom, God has made it impossible for humans, by means of their own wisdom, to come to know him. (2) Despite the evidence of

the wisdom of God in the creation, humans, by means of their own wisdom, did not recognize him.

Both meanings are found in translations. “As God in his wisdom ordained, the world failed to find him by its wisdom.” (REB) “God was wise and decided not to let the people of this world use their wisdom to learn about him.” (CEV) *Denn obwohl sich seine Weisheit in der ganzen Schöpfung zeigt, hat ihn die Welt mit ihrer Weisheit nicht erkannt.* (For although his wisdom reveals itself in the whole creation, the world, in its wisdom, did not recognize him.) (German, *Neue Genfer Übersetzung*) *Denn weil die Welt, umgeben von der Weisheit Gottes, Gott durch ihre Weisheit nicht erkannte, gefiel es Gott wohl, durch die Torheit der Predigt selig zu machen, die daran glauben.* (For since the world, surrounded by the wisdom of God, did not recognize God through its wisdom, it pleased God well, through the foolishness of the proclamation, to save those who believed therein.) (Luther, 1984 revision [German])

## **1 Corinthians 2: 1-16**

### **2. The Holy Spirit the agent of unity**

#### **Verses 1-13. The Spirit reveals true wisdom**

Paul reminded his “brothers,” his fellow believers in Corinth, about the way in which he had presented the message about Jesus Christ. He had not come to them with impressive words or wisdom when he proclaimed the “mystery of God” or (according to another manuscript reading) the “testimony of God.” The apostle did not rely on a clever use of words or make a show of how wise he was in formulating persuasive arguments. When referring to the “mystery of God” or the “testimony of God,” he meant the message about Christ and how through him and what he accomplished by surrendering his life humans would be forgiven of their sins and reconciled to his Father. Whereas the Father had in ages past purposed to reconcile them to himself through his Son, this arrangement remained a mystery until Jesus Christ made his appearance on the earthly scene. (2:1)

Instead of resorting to means that were designed to impress others on an intellectual or emotional level like an eloquent orator or skilled debater, Paul decided to know nothing of that nature while among the Corinthians but made “Jesus Christ and him crucified” the focus of his message. Perhaps the apostle chose to know nothing other than “Jesus Christ and him crucified” on account of the limited results in Athens when he used thoughts from their own Greek writings as he reasoned with an audience that included philosophers. (Acts

17:16-34; see the Notes section on the kind of argumentation Epicurean philosophers may have used when arguing with Paul.) In Corinth, Paul's message centred exclusively on Jesus Christ and what his death made possible. (2:2)

Paul did not arrive in Corinth with a spirit of self-confidence, relying on his personal ability to persuade and impress. From a human standpoint, he came "in weakness and in fear and in much trembling." There was nothing about Paul's personal bearing or manner of presentation that reflected the kind of power, boldness, and confidence that eloquent orators who can sway the masses display. He must have been keenly aware of his personal limitations, and concerned that his own weakness would not detract from his testimony regarding God's Son. (2:3)

Paul's "word" (either his message or his speech [the manner in which he presented the message]) and his preaching (either the content or the nature of his proclamation) did not reflect the persuasive power of human wisdom but did make evident "spirit and power." Likely the "spirit" is the spirit of God that worked mightily in and through the apostle as he carried out his commission. The "power" to which he referred could either be the power evident in the miracles that accompanied his preaching or the powerful effect that the message about Christ had on those who responded to it in faith. Responsive ones began living noble lives distinguished by deep concern and love for others, and they ceased to be enslaved to base desires. (2:4; see the Notes section.) The reason for Paul's approach was so that those who responded to his message and preaching would have a solid faith based on the evidence of God's power and not on the persuasive power associated with the display of impressive human wisdom. (2:5)

Either using the editorial first person plural or including his close fellow workers with himself, Paul contrasted human wisdom with the kind of wisdom he imparted. "We speak wisdom among the mature," he continued, "not, however, the wisdom of this age nor of the rulers of this age," which rulers he saw as coming to nothing or being deprived of their power. God was the source of the "wisdom" Paul made known, and it centered on Christ and what God accomplished through him. The "mature ones" among whom the apostle spoke this wisdom were those who, in faith, had embraced the message about Christ and whose thinking, disposition, and conduct had come to harmonize with his example and teaching. (2:6)

The wisdom revealed in what the Father did through his Son was far greater than the kind of human wisdom of the then-existing age and incomprehensible to the

rulers of the age. (2:6) In verse 8, Paul refers to the rulers of the age as having been involved in the Lord's crucifixion. This would have included Pontius Pilate, Herod Antipas, and the Jewish leaders. Possibly the apostle also had in mind the powers of darkness, for Jesus identified Satan as the "ruler of the world." (John 14:30) By his death in faithfulness, Jesus conquered the world (John 16:33) and, therefore, the apostle could rightly indicate that the rulers of the age had been stripped of their power. (Compare Colossians 2:15.)

A strong marker of contrast (*allá*, meaning "but") serves to introduce the superior wisdom as the "wisdom of God" that Paul spoke "in mystery, the hidden [wisdom], which God predetermined before the ages for our glory." The apostle's speaking "in mystery" does not mean that he himself concealed the wisdom, but that he made known the wisdom pertaining to a mystery that had remained hidden throughout the ages. This mystery related to what God had predetermined before the ages and included how humans would be forgiven of their sins, be divinely approved and, ultimately, attain glory—full sonship as his beloved children. The long-hidden mystery was disclosed when Jesus completed his earthly walk in faithfulness, surrendering his life and thereby providing the basis for repentant humans to be forgiven of their sins and to attain the status of approved children with glory in view. That glory is the sinless state of sonship that is in possession of God's unique Son, Jesus Christ. (2:7)

Not a single one of the rulers who had the opportunity to see Jesus came to know this wisdom, for they did not recognize him as the Son of God and his role in liberating humans from sin and condemnation. If they had known or recognized the wisdom of God, they would not have "crucified the Lord of glory," Jesus Christ. Had they recognized Jesus for who he was and his role in making reconciliation with God possible, it would have been inconceivable for them to have acted against him, either through active participation in sentencing him to death or by doing nothing to prevent this from happening. Herod Antipas, though he found no guilt in Jesus, had soldiers mock him. Prominent Jewish leaders incited the crowd to demand that Jesus be crucified, and Pilate yielded to their will. (Luke 23:8-24) As God's Son, Jesus was the "Lord of glory" who perfectly reflected the very image of his Father, the glorious or magnificent one in the ultimate sense. (2:8)

"But, as it is written" in the sacred scriptures, "'Eye has not seen, and ear has not heard,' and it has not come up in the heart [meaning 'mind' in this context] of man the things that God has prepared for those who love him." It appears that Paul used words from Isaiah 64:4 to show what had happened in the case of the rulers who rejected Christ. Their eyes did not see, and their ears did not hear with understanding, but they remained blind and deaf respecting Jesus' identity



and the things that would be made possible through him for those who loved God. Lovers of God revealed the genuineness of their love by accepting his Son and came to be recipients of what the unbelieving rulers could not have imagined as having been prepared beforehand by God—forgiveness of sins and an approved standing as his beloved children with all the blessings and privileges associated therewith. (2:9)

Including himself among those who love God, Paul continued, “For to us, God, through his spirit, has revealed [the things he has prepared], for the spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.” By means of his spirit, the heavenly Father has revealed to believers all that is needed about himself, his purpose, and his will for them. Everything that is the object of the spirit’s searching pertains to the things of God. This “searching” appears to relate to disclosing what would otherwise remain concealed. Thus, through the spirit, the object of the “searching out” of the things of God is revealed to believers but remains hidden from unbelievers. The “depths of God” could refer to matters relating to his identity (the kind of God he is) or to his will and purpose, which would include the things he has prepared for those who love him. (2:10)

Using a question, Paul illustrated that coming to know the things pertaining to God could only be by means of his spirit. “For who of men [among humans] knows the things of a man except the man’s spirit [that is] in him? So also the things of God no one knows except the spirit of God.” In the case of a man, the spirit that is within him, or the activating or motivating principle of his inner life, identifies who he truly is. Outward appearances are not enough for one to come to know a fellow human. Likewise, without the spirit of God, one could not come to know him and his will and purpose. That is why the things of God remain concealed to the unbelievers of the world, including those who are reputedly wise. (2:11)

The world of mankind that is an alienated state from God also has a spirit. This spirit influences or motivates persons who are a part of the world to think, speak, and act in ways that are centred on self, personal advantage, or the mundane affairs of life. This is not the spirit believers have received, for it is one that does not allow those who have it to perceive the things of God. It is because of having received God’s spirit that believers are in a position to know or recognize the things that he has graciously given them. These things would embrace all the blessings and privileges associated with having been forgiven of their sins and coming to be God’s approved children on the basis of their faith in Jesus Christ and the surrender of his life for them. (2:12)

With the reference to speaking the things of God, Paul again used either the editorial first person plural or included his close associates as also sharing in the same kind of speaking. When speaking about the things of God, the apostle did not use words taught by human wisdom but those taught by the spirit. With the spirit-taught words, he explained “to the spiritual [the] spiritual.” (2:13)

### **Verses 14-16. The unregenerate man is totally ignorant of true wisdom**

Paul did not use a new vocabulary but employed words in common use among the people to whom he proclaimed the message about Jesus Christ. The thoughts he conveyed with the words he spoke, however, were of a spiritual kind. He imparted divine teaching or words that were the product of the operation of God’s spirit upon him. The Greek plural noun in the dative case (*pneumatikoís*) is both a masculine and a neuter form of the word and so could mean either “spiritual persons” or “spiritual things.” The term that has been rendered “explain” (*synkríno*) literally means “judge with” (bring together to compare and then render a judgment on the basis of the comparison) and could denote “compare” or “interpret.”

If the reference is to “spiritual persons,” the thought could be that Paul discerningly adapted his spiritual teaching to those who were spiritual. A number of translations convey a similar sense. “We also speak these things, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual things to spiritual people.” (HCSB) “And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.” (ESV)

When regarded as applying to “spiritual things,” Paul may have been saying that, in his teaching, he explained spiritual things in words God’s spirit imparted to him. Translators who have adopted the sense of “spiritual things” have variously rendered verse 13. “Of these we speak — not in language which man’s wisdom teaches us, but in that which the Spirit teaches — adapting, as we do, spiritual words to spiritual truths.” (Weymouth) “We speak words given to us by the Spirit, using the Spirit’s words to explain spiritual truths.” (NLT) *Von dem, was Gott uns durch seinen Geist offenbart, reden wir so, wie sein Geist es uns lehrt.* (Of that which God has revealed to us by his spirit, we speak just as his spirit teaches us.) (German, *Gute Nachricht Bibel*)

As for the “unspiritual man” (the person who has no relationship with God), he “cannot receive” (or respond in a positive way to) what the spirit of God imparts, “for it is foolishness to him.” He cannot grasp the spiritual truths about Christ and his sacrificial death. These truths make no sense to him. It is

impossible for him to “know” or understand spiritual things, for spiritual things must be judged or evaluated spiritually. A proper understanding of spiritual things requires the guidance of God’s spirit, which unbelievers do not have. (2:14)

The spiritual man is able to judge, evaluate, or assess everything. Guided by God’s spirit, he can properly assess that which has lasting worth and is essential for his life as a servant of God and Christ. He himself, though, is not judged by anyone. No unspiritual person is able to assess who he is as a beloved child of God. (2:15)

Paul quoted words from Isaiah 40:13 (LXX), “For who has come to know the mind of the Lord? Who instructs him?” But we [either an editorial first person plural or Paul and his close associates] have the mind of Christ.” In the Masoretic Text and the Dead Sea Scroll of Isaiah, the reference is to the “spirit of YHWH.” The Son of God did have his Father’s spirit, and so Paul, in his use of Isaiah 40:13, may have meant the “mind of the Lord Jesus Christ.” The apostle did have the mind of Christ, enabling him to make proper judgments or evaluations. Unspiritual persons, though, did not have the mind of Christ and so could not rightly assess or evaluate Paul. (2:16)

### **Notes:**

In his *On the Nature of the Gods*, Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43 BCE) placed the following arguments in the mouth of an Epicurean debater: “I inquire why these powers suddenly appeared as constructors of the world, and why for innumerable ages they were asleep, for it does not follow, if there was no world, that there were no ages. By ages I do not now mean those that are made up of a number of days and nights by means of the yearly revolutions, for I acknowledge that ages in that sense could not have been attained without a rotary movement of the heavens, but from infinitely far back there has existed an eternity, the nature of which in point of extent can be conceived, though it was not measured by periods of time.”

“What reason, again, was there why God should be desirous of decking the world, like an aedile, with figures and lights? If he did so in order that he himself might be better lodged, it is clear that for an infinite amount of time previously he had been living in all the darkness of a hovel. And do we regard him as afterwards deriving pleasure from the diversity with which we see heaven and earth adorned? What delight can that be to God? And if it were a delight, he would not have been able to go without it for so long. Or was this universe, as your school is accustomed to assert, established by God for the sake

of men? Does that mean for the sake of wise men? In that case it was on behalf of but a small number that so vast a work was constructed. Or was it for the sake of the foolish? In the first place there was no reason why God should do a kindness to the bad, and in the second place what did he effect, seeing that the lot of all the foolish is undoubtedly a most miserable one? The chief reason for this is the fact that they are foolish, for what can we name as being more miserable than folly? And the second is the fact that there are so many ills in life that, while the wise alleviate them by a balance of good, the foolish can neither avoid their approach nor endure their presence.” (Translated by Francis Brooks)

Admittedly, faced with this kind of argumentation, Paul would not have been very successful if he had tried to reason with the Epicurean and other philosophers on their terms.

There are various manuscript readings for 1 Corinthians 2:4, including a longer and a shorter version of the text. The expanded text reads, “persuasive words of wisdom”; the shorter version is, “persuasion of wisdom.”

In 1 Corinthians 2:9, the Greek of the quoted words do not match the Greek text of the Septuagint but are in harmony with the message they convey. The similar phrase in Isaiah 64:4(3, LXX) reads, “From the age [from long ago], we have not heard nor have our eyes seen a God besides you, and your works, which you will do for those waiting for mercy.” In view of the mention of God’s works for those who are waiting for his mercy, Paul could rightly speak of the things that “God has prepared for those who love him.”

Instead of a rendering that would allow for an application to the rulers, the *Revised English Bible* translates 1 Corinthians 2:9 in a way that can apply to all things God prepared beforehand for those who love him but which things long remained concealed from the understanding of everyone. “Scripture speaks of ‘things beyond our seeing, things beyond our hearing, things beyond our imagining, all prepared by God for those who love him.’”

## **1 Corinthians 3:1-23**

### **3:1-8a. The spiritual Christian**

#### **Verses 1-3a. The spiritual vs. the worldly**

Even though Paul addressed the Corinthians as his “brothers,” many among them did not manifest themselves to be spiritual persons. In important aspects of life, they failed to follow the leading of God’s spirit. The apostle could not speak to them as spiritual persons but had to speak to them as fleshly persons, “as

babes in Christ.” They were believers and so were “in Christ” as members of his body. But, in certain respects, their conduct resembled that of unspiritual persons in the world of mankind alienated from God. Their behavior was infantile, and this prevented the apostle from sharing with them thoughts that were suited for truly spiritual believers who, in disposition, word, and action, proved themselves to be exemplary children of God. (3:1)

In keeping with their infantile condition, Paul imparted admonition that was suited for “babes in Christ.” He spoke of having given the Corinthians milk to drink and not the solid food that meets the needs of mature persons. In growth as disciples of Jesus Christ, they had not attained the level of strength that made solid food suitable for them, and this continued to be the case up to the time Paul wrote to them. His letter primarily served a corrective purpose and contained the kind of reproof that must often be given to immature youths. (3:2)

### **Verses 3b-8a. The results of worldliness**

The infantile condition of many Corinthian believers was evident from their “fleshly” or unspiritual state. Jealousy (an envious and contentious rivalry) and strife (wrangling or discord) existed among them, revealing that they were “walking as men.” They were conducting themselves as men who were not following the lead of God’s spirit and had not truly transformed their lives to reflect the image of Christ. (3:3) A divisive party spirit had developed among them. To illustrate this, Paul continued, “For when one says, ‘I am of Paul,’ but another [says], I [am] of Apollos, are you not [unspiritual] men?” When believers identify themselves as specifically belonging to a particular man as their leader, they are wrongly elevating him and failing to accord the proper honour to God. They are conducting themselves as people of this world who look to other humans as their leaders and guides. (3:4)

To assist the Corinthians to have a proper estimation of men in relation to God and Christ, Paul raised the questions, “What [Who, according to other manuscripts], then, is Apollos? And what [who, according to other manuscripts] is Paul?” They were “servants” through whom the Corinthians had become believers. Paul and Apollos were not owners or lords to whom any party loyalty was owing. They were servants of God and Christ, and servants who ministered to the Corinthians. Although others had become believers through their ministry, Paul and Apollos performed their individual service “as the Lord granted each [of them].” They carried out the service that the Lord Jesus Christ had assigned to them individually. (3:5)

In his role as one who first brought the message about Christ to Corinth, Paul “planted,” for a community of believers came into existence through his ministry. Later, Apollos proved to be very helpful to those who had become believers (Acts 18:27) and so functioned toward them as would a person who “watered” growing plants. But God was the one who made things grow. Through the operation of his spirit, he made it possible for the Corinthians to have what they needed to progress and flourish as his children. Emphasizing the transcendent importance of what God does in making things grow, Paul added that neither the one doing the planting nor the one doing the watering is anything. (3:6, 7)

### **3:8b – 23. The judgment of the believer’s works**

#### **Verses 8b – 9. Christian service to be judged**

Although the person doing the planting and the person doing the watering may be different individuals, they “are one.” With reference to the plants, their labor has the same purpose. If the Corinthians had recognized this oneness of purpose in the service Paul and Apollos rendered, they would not have succumbed to a divisive party spirit. Whereas the labouring of Paul and Apollos was different, each one would receive his reward or wage in keeping with the work he performed. They were individually accountable to God for the way they cared for their respective tasks. (3:8)

In relation to the service they performed, Paul added, “For we are God’s fellow workers.” He and Apollos served in the furtherance of God’s work. As for the Corinthian believers, they were “God’s field, God’s building.” (3:9) Neither Paul nor Apollos were the owners of the “field” or the “building”; they were the Owner’s servants and laboured at his direction.

#### **Verses 10-15. The believer’s judgment for service**

After having likened the community of believers in Corinth to a “building,” Paul spoke about his labour in terms of construction. In keeping with the gracious favour God had given him, entrusting him with service as an apostle through the agency of his Son, Paul, as a “wise” or skilled master builder, “laid a foundation; someone else, however, [was] building [on it].” The foundation the apostle had laid was sound, for he proclaimed the truth about Christ and what he accomplished through his death. For this reason, Paul could speak of himself as a “wise master builder.” He had not made himself guilty of poor workmanship, failing to impart what the Corinthians needed to be a community established on the right foundation. Whereas he had faithfully discharged his task, Paul urged

the Corinthians individually to watch how they were building on the foundation. (3:10)

There was only one acceptable foundation, and that foundation had already been laid. Paul explicitly identified Jesus Christ as the foundation. Being on the right foundation requires having the proper view of Christ as one's Lord and of the need to live in harmony with his example and teaching. For believers, the objective of building on Christ as the foundation is to continue growing to become more like him. In the case of literal building operations, various materials may be employed—"gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw." (3:11, 12)

While the foundation may be sound, the nature of the building materials will determine the permanence of the superstructure. The apostle did not specifically identify the desirable or the poor or flawed materials individuals might use when building on Christ as the foundation. Jesus Christ was laid as the foundation through the proclamation of the truth about him, and the community of believers came into existence when they responded in faith. So it logically follows that proper building on Christ as the foundation involves the kind of teaching and response to it that would have a positive effect on the life of believers. The Sacred Scriptures contain the sound teaching, and those who impart sound teaching or who apply it to themselves are building with valuable and non-combustible materials comparable to gold, silver, and precious stones. When, however, doctrines, fanciful or speculative interpretations, "church" policies and rules, or traditions that have no apostolic precedence distort or misrepresent Jesus' example and teaching, the building work being done by persons who promote such things or who strive to conform to such things is comparable to using inferior building materials like wood, hay or straw. (3:12)

The kind of building "work" in which each individual engages will become apparent, "for the day will make it clear, because it is revealed in fire; and fire will prove what each one's work is like." The "day" could either refer to the future day of judgment when Christ returns in glory or any day that would result in an exposure of a builder's work. Numerous translations make the reference to the future judgment day explicit, either capitalizing "Day" (NAB, NIV, NJB, NRSV) or adding "of judgment" (CEV, NCV, REB). (3:13)

The phrase "in fire" has commonly been linked to the word "day." In his expanded translation, Kenneth Wuest conveys this meaning, "For the day will make it known, because it [the day] will be made clear as to its identity by means of one of its attributes, namely, fire." Other translations likewise render the verse to denote the "day." "That Day will appear with fire." (NCV) "The day

will show it plainly enough, for the day will arise in a blaze of fire.” (J. B. Phillips) “For that day dawns in fire.” (REB) “The Day which dawns in fire will make it clear.” (NJB) In view of Paul’s reference to building materials, however, there is a possibility that “in fire” may be understood as indicating that the previously mentioned “work” will be exposed “in fire.” The Greek word for “work” (*érgon*) is neuter gender, whereas the Greek word for “day” (*heméra*) is feminine gender. There is, however, no Greek pronoun for “it” in the text itself that definitively settles whether the intended antecedent is “work” or “day.” The passive third person singular verb for “reveal” (*apokalypto*) does not in itself restrict the meaning to “work” or “day.” (3:13)

Paul’s main point, though, is clear. Fire will prove the nature of the work, consuming anything comparable to wood, hay, and straw, and revealing the enduring quality of everything that can be likened to gold, silver, or precious stones. (3:13)

If, when submitted to the fire of judgment, a builder’s work remains, “he will receive a reward.” (3:14) Paul did not mention the nature of that reward but reasonably it would include God’s approval for faithful performance of work well done and additional privileges in divine service. (Compare Matthew 25:14-23; Luke 12:35-44; 19:12-19.)

The person who built with material that the fire of judgment exposed as worthless, with everything being burned up, would live, provided the foundation proved to be Christ. Such a one’s deliverance would be like that of a person who would lose everything in the fire but would himself be snatched from the flames. (3:15) Something similar happened to Lot and his daughters. They lost all their possessions but escaped the fiery destruction of Sodom.

### **Verses 16-23 Solemn warning to worldly believers**

Paul reminded the community of believers in Corinth that they were “God’s temple” in which he resided by means of his spirit. (3:16) This added to the seriousness of the wrong kind of teaching individuals promoted or followed. Destructive teaching constituted an assault on God’s property.

Therefore, the man who made himself guilty of introducing destructive elements among believers would face grave judgment. His attempt to destroy God’s temple would result in ruin for him, for God would inflict on him the punishment of destruction. This is because, as Paul continued, “God’s temple is holy, which temple you [Corinthian believers] are.” The holiness or purity of the



“temple” or community of believers must be preserved, and anyone who exerted a corrupt influence would merit severe divine judgment. (3:17)

Among the Corinthian believers, many seem to have been impressed by the “wisdom of the age,” greatly admiring those who were eloquent and influential. This appears to be the reason Paul warned about not being self-deceived regarding such wisdom and added, “If anyone among you thinks he is wise in this age, let him become a fool so that he may become wise.” (3:18)

The kind of wisdom in which the people of that age took pride did not allow them to see the wisdom of God reflected in the arrangement for having their sins forgiven on the basis of Christ’s sacrifice and gaining an approved relationship with him as his children. It was a wisdom that relied on human ability to persuade and impress. Believers who regarded themselves as possessing this kind of wisdom needed to become fools, ceasing to rely on their own ability to impress, persuade, or sway others. As a result of coming to be persons who did not rely on or glory in impressive persuasive power, they would become truly wise. They would recognize the transcendent wisdom of God, grow as spiritual persons, and be freed from the party spirit that had come into existence because of judging others on the basis of values stemming from worldly wisdom. (3:18)

For many believers in Corinth, a change in attitude regarding worldly wisdom was needed if they were to cease being “babes in Christ.” Paul continued, “For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God.” He then quoted words found in the holy writings, “He catches the wise in their cleverness.” (Job 5:13) “The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are empty.” (Psalm 94:11; [93:11, LXX]) In its application, worldly wisdom leads to wrong evaluations based on mere appearances and cannot fathom the things that are truly spiritual. From God’s standpoint, this wisdom is foolishness. (3:19, 20)

By means of worldly wisdom, the noble standing that God’s approved children enjoy cannot be attained. Those who may be admired in the world of mankind may be very clever in attaining their objectives. When, though, their wisdom stands in opposition to God’s ways, they eventually reap the consequences of their folly. Through the outworking of his moral law, God catches them in their “cleverness” or “cunning.” (3:19)

Similarly, when the thoughts of the “wise” are contrary to God’s ways, they are empty, futile, or vain. He knows these thoughts for what they are. They are worthless and will come to nothing. (3:20)

The aspects of worldly wisdom that sway humans (impressive personal bearing and persuasive power) tend to promote a divisive party spirit. Addressing this problem among the Corinthian believers, Paul emphasized the right view of men. The Corinthians were not to look to men as leaders, boasting in such men or taking pride in being among those with a special attachment to them. They were not to regard themselves as belonging to any human who may have been of spiritual help to them. Instead, they were to consider everyone who may have contributed to their spiritual life as belonging to them. Believers are not owned by fellow believers, but belong to one another as members of a beloved family of God's children. (3:21)

The apostle continued, "Whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas [Peter] or the world or life or death or things now present or future — all belong to you, but you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God." Paul, Apollos, and Cephas were their brothers in Christ. They were servants of the community of believers as a whole. In the world of mankind, essential services and functions are performed, and from these believers derive benefits. Rightly, then, they can look upon the world as a servant, a functioning society of people that provides food, clothing, shelter, and other necessities. The life believers enjoy is at their disposal, to be used as a servant in a way that is appropriate for God's children. Even death is a servant. Through death, believers gain entrance into the fullness of eternal life upon being resurrected. Nothing that then existed in the human sphere or which would come to exist in the future would occupy the position of an owner. Believers belong to Christ. He is their Lord or Owner who laid down his life for them. Ultimately, believers belong to God, for Christ belongs to his Father as his unique Son. (3:22, 23)

### **Notes:**

In 1 Corinthians 3:3, a number of manuscripts mention "divisions" (*dichostasíai*) as also existing among the Corinthians. This would mean that certain ones had cut themselves off from others, not associating freely with them.

The quotation from Job 5:13 in 1 Corinthians 3:19 does not reflect the wording of the extant Greek text of the Septuagint. Of the principal words, only the term for "wise" is identical. Nevertheless, the meaning of the text is the same. In the context of Job 5, Eliphaz used the words to reprove Job, implying that he had sinned and, for this reason, had been seized in his cleverness. While Eliphaz erred in his judgment of Job's situation, his comments conveyed the truth that God catches or seizes the wise in their cleverness or cunning. Appropriately, therefore, the apostle used the words in keeping with this truth.

In 1 Corinthians 3:20, the quotation from Psalm 94:11 (93:11, LXX) follows the wording of the extant Septuagint text, with the exception of one word. Instead of the broader term “men,” the apostle used the more restrictive noun “wise.” In the context of Psalm 94, the men to whom reference is made would have viewed themselves as wise.

## **1 Corinthians 4: 1-21**

### **4. The church and its leaders**

#### **Verses 1-8. The sin of judging God’s servants**

Based on the discussion that follows, the first person plural “us” appears to include Paul and fellow apostles (particularly apostles of congregations whom he knew personally). It was his desire that others would consider him and them as “servants” or “helpers of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.” As servants of Christ, they would be advancing his interests, declaring the message about him and assisting others to become and remain his loyal disciples. The “mysteries of God” related to his arrangement for humans to be forgiven of their sins and come into an approved relationship with him as his children. As stewards, Paul and fellow apostles would be making known the “mysteries of God,” which had long remained hidden but came to be fully revealed when his Son arrived on the earthly scene. From the time of Jesus’ resurrection and ascension to heaven, those entrusted with the stewardship of the “mysteries of God” needed to make them known to others. (4:1)

The position of a steward was one of trust. Though themselves servants, stewards had significant responsibilities, often being in charge of a body of servants and the management of the owner’s property. Therefore, as Paul noted, the essential requirement for stewards was that the owner would find them to be “faithful,” trustworthy, or dependable. (4:2)

As one whom God and Christ owned, Paul gave no weight to any judgment humans might render concerning him. When speaking of such evaluation as a “least thing” or insignificant matter, he used the expression “human day,” meaning a time for humans to hold an accounting or to pass judgment. Even he did not judge or make an assessment of himself. (4:3)

Although Paul was not aware of anything against himself in the discharge of his divinely granted stewardship, this did not prove that he was justified or free from any fault. The judgment that counted was not his own, but that of his Lord, the one who would judge him. In view of his thereafter referring to the coming of the Lord, Paul meant the Lord Jesus Christ. (4:4)

Having established that human judgments have no real significance, the apostle admonished the Corinthians not to judge anything “before the time,” but to wait until “the Lord comes.” He is the one who “will bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts.” (4:5)

For believers to pass judgments on others in relation to their service of Christ would be premature and disrespectful to him as the Lord who has the authority to judge his servants. He, not humans, is able to bring to light things that may have been done in secret (whether good or bad). Though certain acts may have been concealed from human view as under the cover of darkness, they are not hidden from the Lord Jesus Christ. He can also reveal the “counsels of the hearts” or the aims or purposes originating in the inmost selves of the individuals, disclosing the true motives that he is unerringly able to discern. Upon receiving his favourable judgment, individual believers will then come to have “praise from God,” receiving commendation that truly counts. (4:5)

It was for the Corinthians or for their benefit that Paul had applied to himself and Apollos the things he wrote. This suggests that he did not include the names of those to whom certain ones looked as leaders and who had a following, resulting in divisions within the community of believers. By using himself and Apollos as examples, Paul wanted to illustrate the impropriety of setting up men as leaders. Regarding his purpose, he said, “so that through us you may learn not to go beyond the things written.” The “things written” could refer to what Paul had written or the “sacred writings,” which exalt God, not men. When the words directed against an inordinate elevation of humans are heeded, this prevents people from having an inflated view of one person over another. (4:6)

Paul then raised the question, “For who differentiates you?” This has been understood in two basic ways: (1) For who makes you different from another person? (2) For who discerns anything different in you? (4:7)

Regardless of which way the question is understood, the implied answer is that one person is not so outstandingly distinguished from another as to make him more important. In their renderings, a number of translations make the question implicit, which also affects the implied answer. “Who says you are better than others?” (NCV) “Who made you so important?” (NJB) “Who confers distinction upon you?” (NAB) “What is so special about you?” (CEV)

The apostle continued, “What do you have that you did not receive? If, however, you also received [it], why do you brag as [if] you did not receive [it]?” The gifts or endowments the Corinthians had were not of their own making. They

had received these endowments, ruling out all grounds for boasting and exalting humans. (4:7)

In their infantile spiritual state, many of the Corinthians reflected a boastful spirit, which appears to have been directly linked to their looking to certain men as their leaders. In their prideful manner of acting, they made it appear as if they had attained everything they wanted. This is evident from the questions Paul directed to them. “Already satisfied, are you? Already rich? Begun reigning without us?” He would have wished that they had indeed been reigning so that he and his fellow apostles could reign with them. (4:8)

### **Verses 9-21 The holy dedication of the apostles**

The apostle contrasted his own humiliated state and that of the other apostles with the prideful or assumed elevated state of many in Corinth. The hardships and dangers from which he and the others had not been divinely shielded made him think that God had exhibited him and them like men appointed to die as a spectacle during the last event in an amphitheatre or arena, a spectacle to “the world [*kósmos*], both [literally, and] to angels and to men.” (4:9)

Paul continued, “We are fools on account of Christ, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are glorified, but we are dishonoured.” (4:10) To the world alienated from God, they appeared like fools, subject to mockery and abuse. In their own estimation, certain ones in Corinth, on the other hand, regarded themselves as wise. Submitted to persecution and ridicule, Paul and his fellow apostles appeared to be weak. Those in Corinth who boasted in their presumed exalted state, however, seemed strong. They were held in honour, whereas Paul and his fellow apostles were in disgrace, treated as nobodies.

To that very “hour” or time, they experienced hunger, thirst, nakedness (not having sufficient clothing for comfort), and beating or mistreatment. In carrying out their ministry, they were wanderers, without a place to call home. (4:11)

Paul and his fellow apostles toiled with their own hands to support themselves, probably doing so to the point of weariness. Though others reviled them, hurling abusive words at them, they did not retaliate in kind or pronounce curses but “blessed” those who were intent on harming them. They wanted to see a change for the better among those who treated them hatefully. In their attitude and expressions toward them, Paul and his fellow apostles desired good to come to them. Persecuted, he and the others patiently endured the ill treatment. (4:12)

Though themselves defamed, they, in a loving and caring manner, entreated those who had not been favourably inclined, appealing to them to become reconciled to God. Until then, unbelievers regarded them like the “rubbish of the world, the trash of all things.” They looked upon Paul and his fellow apostles as worthless garbage. (4:13)

When drawing this sharp contrast between their presumed exalted state and his own circumstances as a divinely chosen and commissioned apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, Paul did not do so to shame the Corinthians or to make them painfully aware of the folly of their ways. He did so as a fellow believer who deeply loved them. As he had first brought the message about Christ to them and they had responded, they were like children to him for whom he had deep care and concern. His words served to admonish them as his beloved children. (4:14)

They might have many “tutors” in Christ, but they did not have many “fathers.” “In Christ” or by virtue of his being at one with Christ and in his service, Paul had become their father through the evangel. (4:15)

The “tutor” (*paidagogós*) of ancient times filled the role of a guardian who led a youth to his teacher. So, although the Corinthians might have many tutors “in Christ” or fellow believers who looked out for them and their spiritual interests, Paul’s role was unique. He was the first to be among them, proclaiming the message about the Son of God. Through his ministry in the service of Christ, the community of believers had come into existence. In that sense, he was their only “father.” (4:15)

While ministering to the Corinthians, Paul had been like a loving and concerned father, setting a good example for them. For this reason, he could rightly appeal to them, “Become imitators of me.” (4:16) He had not exalted himself and so did not contribute to the divisive party spirit that had developed among the Corinthians. He was in their midst as one serving, labouring with his own hands to supply his needs. In his teaching, Paul directed their attention away from himself and to Jesus Christ and his Father. (Compare Acts 20:31-35; 1 Thessalonians 2:5-12.)

To remind them about the manner he had conducted himself and what and how he had taught, Paul informed them that he was sending Timothy to them. A very close relationship existed between Paul and Timothy. The apostle referred to him as “my beloved and faithful [trustworthy or dependable] child in the Lord.” Young Timothy proved to be like a beloved son to Paul in their mutual relationship of oneness with the Lord Jesus Christ. The apostle had the utmost confidence in Timothy, telling the Corinthians, He “will remind you of my ways

in Christ Jesus, just as I teach everywhere in all the congregations.” (4:17; see the Notes section.) In the manner Timothy would conduct himself in their midst, the Corinthians would see the same loving and caring disposition that Paul had displayed. (Compare Philippians 2:20.) In keeping with the apostle’s example, Timothy would make God and Christ central to his teaching, imparting instruction that would serve to promote love, strengthen faith, and encourage praiseworthy conduct and compassionate concern for others. (Compare 1 Timothy 1:3-5; 4:6-11; 6:6-10, 17-19.)

Whereas Paul had proved himself to be an example worthy of imitation as a loyal disciple of Jesus Christ, certain ones among the Corinthian believers had a very negative view of him. They appear to have felt that Paul was personally afraid to come to Corinth again. This seems to have led to their manifesting an arrogant attitude, conducting themselves in a manner that did not advance the cause of God and Christ. (4:18)

Addressing these self-important detractors, Paul continued, “I shall soon come to you, if the Lord wills.” (4:19) Even in his personal determination, he acknowledged that the visit would take place provided it proved to be the will of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Upon being in Corinth, Paul would be in position to “know” or see the difference between the talk of the inflated detractors and their power. The implication is that those who were impressed by their own self-importance could make boastful claims, but they did so without any power or authoritative backing. (4:19)

“The kingdom of God,” or the reign of God in the lives of believers who recognize him as their Sovereign, is not a matter of words. It manifests itself “in power.” Submission to God’s rule produces a real transformation in the lives of individuals. Through the powerful working of Holy Spirit, believers come to reflect the image of God to an increasingly greater extent. (4:20)

Divine power was at work in Paul as an apostle and so he challengingly asked those who looked down upon him as weak, “What do you wish? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love in a spirit of mildness?” They needed to think seriously about whether they would prefer to see Paul in the role of a strict disciplinarian or whether they would be better served if he came to them as a loving brother, with a gentle or kindly disposition. (4:21)

## **Notes:**

The Greek word *kósmos*, though commonly associated with the human sphere or the world of mankind, was also used by the ancient Greeks to designate the universe. In view of the reference to angels and men, the meaning of “universe” seems to fit in 1 Corinthians 4:9.

In 1 Corinthians 4:15, Paul, in his relation to the Corinthians, referred to their not having many fathers but that he had become such to them “in Christ.” This did not mean that he wanted believers there to call him “father,” which would not have been in harmony with Jesus’ words to address only his Father in that manner. (Matthew 23:9) The context limits the apostle’s words to his role in having initially brought the good news about Christ to the Corinthians. This is apparent from the fact that Paul revealed that his relationship to them came about “in Christ” (by virtue of his oneness with Christ and their having come to share in that oneness with the Son of God) and “through the evangel” (or through the good news that he proclaimed and which they accepted). “In Christ Jesus, I have fathered you through the evangel.”

Manuscripts vary, either including or omitting the name “Jesus” in 1 Corinthians 4:17.

## **1 Corinthians 5:1-13**

### **5. The problem of the immoral believer**

#### **Verses 1-5. Carnality blinds to the presence of gross immorality**

A shocking case of sexual immorality came to be known as existing among the community of believers in Corinth. One man had taken up living incestuously with his stepmother, “the wife of his father.” This conduct violated even the mores of non-Jews, making it virtually unheard of. (5:1; see the Notes section.)

Nevertheless, a significant number of the Corinthian believers took pride in this outrageous development, perhaps feeling that it was an evidence of their great freedom in Christ. Instead of being inflated about what had happened in their midst, they should have mourned or been grievously saddened by it and taken action to clear themselves of this blot on them as a community of believers. They should have removed the practiser of this badness from their midst. (5:2)

Even though Paul was not personally present (“absent in body”), he was there “in spirit,” or there in his thoughts. Already, as if personally present, he had



determined that the incestuous man should be expelled from the congregation. (5:3)

Therefore, at a time when they would all be meeting “in the name” of the Lord Jesus (or in recognition of Jesus’ authority as the head of the congregation), the believers in Corinth and Paul, who was there “in spirit” (as he had expressed his thoughts), were to take action. “With the power” of the Lord Jesus, they were to hand the incestuous man over to Satan. Paul’s mention of Jesus’ power suggests that the action of the congregation would have the authoritative backing of the Son of God. This would not be an arbitrary action, but one that Jesus Christ approved, for it harmonized with his example and teaching. (Compare Revelation 2:20-23.) In the community of believers, God is recognized as Sovereign and all associated acknowledge Jesus as their Lord through loyal submission to him, heeding his teaching and imitating his example. For the man to have been handed over to Satan would have meant expelling him from the congregation and exposing him to the world where the adversary exercises authority. The incestuous man would then find himself outside the realm where God’s spirit is at work, and would be in the realm where people lived without any knowledge of God and were primarily guided by their sensual desires. (5:4, 5)

Paul explained that the congregational action would serve “for the destruction of the flesh, so that the spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord.” The apostle often used the designation “flesh” (*sárx*) to designate sinful human nature. In the case of the incestuous man, he had yielded to it, and the “flesh” or his sinful nature had become the controlling force in his life. For the man’s “spirit” to be saved in the day of the Lord, or for him not to experience the condemnation of those alienated from and at enmity with God at the time the Lord Jesus Christ returned in glory, required that his “flesh,” or that the dominion of his sinful human nature, be destroyed. With his sinful human nature having been deprived of dominance, his “spirit,” his real self, or he himself in his inner being would no longer be divinely disapproved. Accordingly, Paul’s ultimate hope was that, upon again experiencing what it meant to be in the sphere where the influence of Satan exists, the man would come to repentance and cease to be enslaved to sin. (5:5)

### **Verses 6-13. The principle of the yeast of sin**

The fact that the Corinthians had boasted about what had happened in their midst was not good. Paul reminded them of the danger of corruption, “Do you not know [or recognize] that a little leaven leavens the whole batch [of dough]?” (5:6) The incestuous man had proved to be like leaven in the community of

believers. His outrageous action could have emboldened others to make themselves guilty of similar God-dishonouring actions.

Paul urged the Corinthians to rid themselves of the “old leaven” or the corrupt element in their midst. As a result, they would be a “new batch,” a community free from “leaven” or corruption. This would be in keeping with the reality that Christ, their “Passover [lamb],” had been sacrificed. (5:7) Just as the firstborn Israelites in Egypt were saved from death by the blood of the Passover victim, the blood of the Christ, the “Lamb of God,” provides the basis for forgiveness of sins and deliverance from the condemnation of death.

“Therefore,” Paul continued, “let us keep the festival, not with old leaven nor with leaven of badness and wickedness, but with unleavened [loaves] of sincerity and truth.” (5:8) Among the Israelites, the Festival of Unleavened Bread followed the observance of the Passover. During the entire festival, no leaven or leavened items could be used. Christ, as the Passover lamb, died once for all time. Accordingly, the life of believers is comparable to the continual observance of the “festival,” free from the kind of defilement or corruption that leaven can represent because of the effect a small amount can have when introduced into a large batch of dough. Believers should lead lives that are comparable to bread free from leaven and, therefore, reflecting “sincerity” or purity (not adulterated by depravity and evil) and “truth” (whatever is true, right, or proper). (5:8)

Paul referred to having written them about not associating with or keeping company with sexually immoral people. The Greek verb for “write” (*gráphō*) is in the aorist tense and is here understood as meaning that the writing of the letter occurred in the past. The letter known as “1 Corinthians” does not contain an earlier mention of the point about association. So it appears that the letter to which Paul referred has not been preserved. Possibly a misunderstanding had resulted from the earlier letter, for the apostle seems to clarify what he meant. (5:9)

It was not Paul’s intent for the Corinthians to conclude that they must cut off all association with immoral persons or individuals engaging in other wrongs — greed, theft, or idolatry. Believers still found themselves in the world and had to interact with unbelievers who lived in a manner contrary to God’s ways. Therefore, for the Corinthians to have no association with sinful people would have required physically getting out of the world, which would have been impossible for them. (5:10)

Paul wanted them to understand that he meant that they should not associate with anyone who identified himself as a “brother” or fellow believer but lived a debauched life of sexual immorality, greediness or idolatry, or proved to be a reviler, drunkard, or thief. They were not even to eat with such a person. At that time, believers regularly met in homes, partaking of meals with fellow believers and enjoying spiritual fellowship. Because table fellowship was very much a part of the life of the community of believers, Paul specifically mentioned that they should not eat with those who called themselves “brothers” but continued to carry on sinful practices. (5:11)

As far as those outside the community of believers was concerned, Paul raised the question, “For what have I to do with judging those outside?” Disciples of God’s Son have not been granted authorization to judge or condemn persons who are part of the world, but they do have the right and duty to render a judgment respecting gross sinners inside the congregation. Paul expressed this thought with a question, “Do you not judge those inside, whereas God judges those outside?” In agreement with their responsibility to pass judgment on gross sinners in their midst, the apostle admonished the Corinthians, “Expel the wicked one from among yourselves.” (5:12, 13)

#### **Notes:**

Neither in verse 1 nor in subsequent verses did Paul mention any action to be undertaken against the woman who was likewise guilty of incest. This suggests that she did not happen to be a believer.

For the opening words of verse 4, there are various manuscript readings (“in the name of our Lord Jesus”; “in the name of the Lord Jesus”; “in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ”; “in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,” and “in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord”). Depending on the punctuation that is chosen, this phrase can be linked to the words that either precede or follow it.

In the comments on verse 4, the opening phrase is explained as relating to the meeting of the Corinthian congregation. Numerous translations convey this significance. “When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, hand this man over to Satan.” (NIV) “When you are all assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus, and I am with you in spirit, through the power of our Lord Jesus you are to consign this man to Satan.” (REB) “When you have gathered together in the name of our Lord Jesus, with the presence of my spirit, and in the power of our Lord Jesus, hand such a man over to Satan.” (NJB)

There is a possibility, however, that the phrase, “in the name,” applies to the action Paul had taken when expressing his judgment on the incestuous man. “I have already pronounced judgment in the name of the Lord Jesus on the man who has done such a thing.” (NRSV) “But in the name of our Lord Jesus I have already judged this man.” (CEV) “Concerning the one who has done this, I have already passed judgment in the name of the Lord Jesus.” (NLT)

A less likely significance for the phrase would be to apply it to the wrongdoer’s claim to have acted “in the name of the Lord” (“on the man who has done such a thing in the name of the Lord”; NRSV, footnote).

In 1 Corinthians 5:5, numerous manuscripts have an expanded reading for the expression “day of the Lord” (“day of the Lord Jesus”; “day of the Lord Jesus Christ”; “day of our Lord Jesus,” and “day of our Lord Jesus Christ”).

With the exception of either a different initial verb or a different form of the same verb, the Greek words of 1 Corinthians 5:13 are the same as those in the Septuagint for the last phrase of Deuteronomy 13:5(6) and 17:7.

## **1 Corinthians 6:1-20**

### **6:1-8. The disorder of legal suits**

#### **Verses 1-8. Christian using Christian**

Paul raised the question about whether any of the Corinthians were so daring or bold as to bring a case against a fellow believer “before the unrighteous and not before the holy ones.” (6:1) The “unrighteous” would have been unbelievers who served in the capacity of judges and were not bound to act in harmony with the teaching and example of God’s Son. For believers to prefer the judgment of unbelievers would have been an affront to the “holy ones” or fellow believers.

Continuing to reason with the Corinthians regarding this, the apostle asked, “Do you not know that the holy ones will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the least things? Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more so matters of [daily] life!” (6:2, 3)

The apostle provided no details about the role of the holy ones in judging the world and angels, his main point being that they would be handling far weightier matters than those involving the affairs of ordinary life. While on earth, Jesus had told the apostles that they would be acting as judges at the time he would be exercising royal authority. (Matthew 19:28) Paul’s words indicate that this judging would not be limited to the apostles. With Jesus’ being both king and

judge by his Father's appointment, all judging of humans (the world of mankind) and angels would be under his direction and in harmony with the ultimate standard of divine justice. The Scriptures refer to disobedient angels as facing future judgment (2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6), and it is likely that they are the ones to whom Paul made reference. (6:2, 3)

In view of their future judging responsibilities, it would have been inconsistent for believers not to make decisions about minor or ordinary matters as if they were completely unworthy or unfit to do so. Unbelievers who served as judges had no divine assurance of being granted a far more significant role in judging nor did they know or recognize God's standard of justice. From the standpoint of a standing before God, they had none and were without honour. For this reason, they could be spoken of as persons having no particular worth. So, when believers chose to take ordinary cases before them, they were seating persons looked down upon as their judges, making them their superiors in relation to the congregation. (6:4)

### **6:9-20. The snare of fornication**

#### **Verses 9-20 The Christian tempted by fornication**

When thus reasoning with the Corinthians, Paul's intent was to jolt them to their senses, causing them to be ashamed of how they had acted. Was there not one wise person in their midst who had the capability to judge? By their actions, they suggested that not a single one among them had the needed wisdom, for "brother" or fellow believer went with "brother" to be judged by unbelievers. (6:5, 6)

Taking fellow believers before judges of the world had already meant complete failure or defeat for the Corinthians. It reflected a spirit contrary to that of Christ, because greed, vindictiveness, or retaliation (not generosity, compassion, love, and forgiveness) would have been the underlying factors prompting such litigation. It would have been preferable or better for believers to have been wronged, treated unjustly, or defrauded than for them to take action that wronged others. In this case, they wronged and defrauded their own "brothers" or fellow believers. (6:7, 8)

It appears that those in Corinth who resorted to litigation and thereby harmed fellow believers lost sight of the fact that unjust persons would not inherit God's kingdom, prompting Paul to raise the question whether they did not "know" this. In the sphere where God is recognized as Sovereign, there is no place for practicers of injustice nor for those who engage in other injurious practices. The

Corinthians were not to be misled in this regard, imagining that certain unjust or harmful actions were exempt from divine condemnation. Those engaging in sexual immorality, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes (*malakós*), men who have sexual relations with males (*arsenokoítes*), thieves, covetous or greedy persons, drunkards, revilers or defamers, and robbers or extortioners will not inherit God's kingdom. They will have no share in the realm where God is acknowledged as Sovereign and where his ways are loyally followed. (6:9, 10)

Before becoming believers, some of the Corinthians had engaged in the very practices that would keep one out of God's kingdom. They had, however, repented of their past conduct and had been washed clean, sanctified or set apart as holy, and justified "in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the spirit of our God." On the basis of their faith in the Son of God and the value of his shed blood, they had been forgiven their sins and thus washed clean from the stain of their past transgressions. No longer did they continue in an impure or defiled state, but they had been set apart as members of God's holy or clean people. They had also been justified or put right with God, gaining an approved standing before him. All this had taken place "in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ" or on the basis of who he is and what he accomplished through his death. Moreover, God's spirit began operating within them, producing the changes in their lives that conformed to divine holiness or purity. (6:11)

Accordingly, the freedom that Christ opened up to them was liberation from sin and its condemnation. This, however, was not a freedom without limits. Duties were associated with this liberty. Whereas believers might have the right to do certain things, out of regard for the conscience of others they would lovingly refrain from any action that could give rise to needless offense. The apostle Paul commented on this aspect, saying, "All things are lawful for me, but not all things are beneficial. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be enslaved by anything." The "all things" include everything that he, as a spirit-guided believer, had every right to do. He recognized, though, that what he could do in certain cases would not necessarily be beneficial in its effect on others and in its outworking for him. Paul was not going to permit anything (any desire or inclination) to gain the mastery over him, interfering with his loyalty to God and Christ and creating a cause of offense or stumbling for others. (6:12)

It appears that there were those in Corinth who did not recognize the importance of not being dominated by desires. They seem to have excused sexual immorality on the basis that it served to satisfy a natural desire, a desire comparable to that for food. Paul, though, made the difference very clear. "Foods for the stomach, and the stomach for foods, but God will make an end to

both it [the stomach] and them [the foods].” The body, however, [is] not for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord [is] for the body.” (6:13)

On earth, foods suitable for the human stomach are available, and the stomach is equipped to digest these foods. The future glorified body believers are to have does not need food and the digestive system. Moreover, the moderate eating of food has no effect on the inner life of the individual at the present time nor in the future. Therefore, neither the eating of certain foods nor the abstaining from certain foods has any bearing on God’s view of the individual. (6:13)

This is not the case with sexual immorality, for the body is “for the Lord” Jesus Christ, to be used in harmony with his Father’s will and not for sexual immorality. The Lord is “for the body.” He is at one with the body and supplies it with what it needs to remain in living unity with him. (6:13)

Although the resurrection body will be a changed glorified one, having a different nature in an incorruptible state, it will be the entity that links the past life to the future life. This seems to be the apparent reason for Paul’s reference to the resurrection. “God also raised the Lord and will raise us through his power.” The reality of Christ’s resurrection provides the assurance that dead believers will rise through the operation of God’s mighty power. Therefore, they should preserve the body in purity, for the transformed glorified body with which they are to be raised makes a continuity of existence possible. (6:14)

While still on earth, believers belong to Christ and so their bodies are not their own. Paul reminded the Corinthians, “Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?” Believers are at one with Christ as members of his congregational body. So Paul raises the question, “So shall I take the members of Christ [and] make them members of a harlot?” His emphatic answer is, “Never may it be!” For believers, their relationship with Christ precludes any union with a harlot or any form of sexual immorality. Through sexual union of any one of his body members to a harlot, Christ would, in effect, be joined to a harlot. (6:15)

This is because, as Paul reasoned with the Corinthians, “Do you not know that one who joins himself to a harlot is one body [with her]?” He then supported this conclusion with words quoted from Genesis 2:24, indicating that, in the intimate relationship of a man and a woman, the two would be “one flesh.” (6:16)

The union with Jesus Christ is not of a physical nature, “but the one joined to the Lord is one spirit [with him].” Having the mind of Christ, the believer is one in

thought and purpose with him in finding delight in the doing of his Father's will. (6:17)

For the believer to continue at one with the Son of God makes it imperative to maintain sexual purity. "Flee from sexual immorality. Every sin a man may commit is outside the body, but he who engages in sexual immorality sins against his own body." Every effort should be made to avoid situations that could lead to temptation. One should strive to escape from such circumstances as would one fleeing from danger to life and limb. Unlike other sins that do not involve the body so completely, the committing of sexual immorality makes the body as a whole, in a very intimate manner, the instrument of sin. Therefore, the man who engages in sexual immorality sins against his own body, which he uses in a sinful manner. (6:18)

For believers, this is very serious, for the body is to remain a sacred place, a temple for the Holy Spirit that comes from God. For anyone to commit sexual immorality would constitute a defilement of this temple or sanctuary, showing gross disrespect for God who has provided his spirit to promote holiness or purity within the believer and which cleanness should be evident in the outer life. (6:19)

Believers are not their own. They have been bought with a costly price—the precious blood of the Son of God who sacrificed his life for them. As persons purchased, they belong to God and should rightly glorify or magnify him in their owned body, using their whole physical being in a manner that reflects the highest regard for his requirements in matters of conduct. (6:19, 20; see the Notes section.)

### Notes:

In 1 Corinthians 6:9, the Greek word designating a male prostitute is *malakós*, literally meaning one who is "soft" and designating the passive man or boy in same-sex intercourse. The word *arsenokoítes*, a compound consisting of "male" and "bed," appears in the same verse and applies to the dominant male in a same-sex relationship, the aggressive seducer, or the sexual abuser of boys.

Greek manuscripts contain different readings in 1 Corinthians 6:11, including "the name of the Lord Jesus Christ," "the name of our Lord Jesus Christ," and "the name of the Lord Jesus."

The quotation in 1 Corinthians 6:16 from Genesis 2:24 includes the Greek words found in the Septuagint reading of the Genesis passage. The Greek form of the word for "says," which introduces the quotation, has been translated to mean "it



says” or “he says.” This is because the Greek third person singular verb (*phesín*) can mean “it says,” “he says,” or “she says [which English meaning would not fit the context].” In the Genesis account, the statement may be understood as being attributed to God, allowing for the meaning “he says.” The meaning “it says” would also fit, for it is said in scripture or in the Torah.

The concluding words of 1 Corinthians 6:19 (“and you are not of yourselves,” meaning “you are not your own”) may be understood as part of the question that starts at the beginning of the verse. “Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit in you, which you have from God, and [that] you are not your own?” The other possibility is that the concluding phrase of verse 19 starts a new sentence that is completed in verse 20. “And you are not your own, for you were bought with a price.”

Numerous manuscripts contain an expanded text in 1 Corinthians 6:20. After the admonition “glorify God in your body,” other manuscripts add, “and in your spirit” or “and in your spirit, which is of God.”

## **1 Corinthians 7: 1-40**

### **7:1-24 Regulations of Christian marriage**

#### **Verses 1-9. The purpose of Christian marriage**

At this point in his letter, Paul addressed matters concerning which the Corinthians had written to him. Seemingly, in view of the then-prevailing conditions believers faced, he indicated that it would be “good” or preferable for “a man not to touch a woman” (that is, in an intimate manner as a husband). (Compare Genesis 20:6.) A number of modern translations render the phrase, “not to touch a woman” according to its apparent meaning. (7:1) “It is a good thing for a man not to have intercourse with a woman.” (REB) “It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.” (NCV)

On account of the prevalence of sexual immorality, however, the apostle indicated that it would be advisable for a man to have his own wife, and a woman to have her own husband. (7:2)

A husband would be obligated to render the conjugal due to his wife, and the wife would likewise be under obligation to her husband. (7:3; see the Notes section.) Neither the husband nor the wife are to deny the other mate of the rightful marital due. For this reason, Paul mentioned that the wife and the husband do not exercise control of their own bodies but their mates do. (7:4) They should not deprive one another of the conjugal due except by mutual

consent. One reason for the mutual agreement would be for the opportunity to devote themselves to prayer. Numerous manuscripts also include “fasting.” After a period of abstinence for spiritual reasons, married couples are advised to resume customary intimacies and thus avoid temptation. Strong sexual desires could leave a marriage mate open to Satan’s trap and would result in being ensnared into engaging in sexual immorality. (7:5)

Paul’s reference to his making a concession seemingly relates to the temporary withholding of marital dues by mutual consent. His words, though, were not intended as a command. (7:6)

Probably because of what he was able to accomplish as a servant of God and Christ in the unmarried state, Paul expressed the personal view that he wished all believing men were single as he was. Nevertheless, he acknowledged that this would not be possible for everyone, for each person had his “own gracious gift from God, one in this way and one in another.” (7:7)

In the case of unmarried persons and widows, Paul said that it would be good for them to remain single as he was. (7:8) If, however, they did not have the kind of self-control that would allow them to live a single life in purity, it would be better for them to marry than to be consumed with passionate desires (literally, “to be set on fire”). (7:9)

### **Verses 10-24 Regulations governing Christian marriage**

In the case of married couples, Paul directed that a wife should not separate from her husband. If a separation were to occur, the wife should either remain single or seek reconciliation with him. Also a husband should not leave his wife. This harmonized with Jesus’ teaching that marriage was to be a permanent union. (Matthew 19:3-9) To indicate that his words had Christ’s authoritative backing, Paul said, “Not I, but the Lord.” (7:10, 11)

The apostle identified guidelines for which he did not have any specific teaching from the Son of God. Relative to the situation of a believer being married to an unbeliever, Paul acknowledged, “I say, not the Lord.” If a believing husband (literally, a “brother”) had an unbelieving wife and she was willing to continue living with him, he should not to leave her. Likewise, if an unbelieving husband assented to remain with her, she should not leave him. (7:12, 13)

Neither unbelieving husbands or wives are unclean to their believing marriage mates. As far as the marriage is concerned, the unbelieving husband is sanctified or made holy, clean, or pure through his believing wife, and the same is true of a believing husband (the “brother,” according to numerous manuscripts) with

reference to his unbelieving wife. If this were not the case, the offspring of the parents would be unclean, but as Paul added, “Now they are holy.” In God’s view the children are acceptable and not defiled. (7:14; see the Notes section.)

If, though, the unbeliever chose to leave, the believer would not try to prevent it. The “brother or sister” would not in that case be in a state of bondage. Believers would not be obligated to put forth extraordinary efforts in attempts to keep the marriage intact. (7:15)

The reason for the position of believers regarding the separation is, “God has called us [you, according to other manuscripts] to peace.” Manuscripts that say “called us” indicate that God’s call or invitation is one into a relationship of peace with him and, to the extent possible, with fellow humans. For a believer to try to preserve a marriage that an unbeliever did not want would lead to conflict, disrupting the peace to which God had called the believer. Other Greek manuscripts read “called you,” and could be understood to relate more specifically to the situation of believers whose unbelieving mates choose separation. In that case, their departure could serve to contribute to the restoration of the peace to which God has called believers. (7:15) The apostle then raised the questions, “For how do you know, wife, if you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, if you will save your wife?” (7:16)

In the event they relate to unbelieving marriage mates who are willing to remain with believers, these questions would point to the beneficial result that could come about when believers do not choose separation. Unbelievers, upon continuing to see the exemplary conduct of their mates, may eventually respond in faith to the Son of God and come to be his disciples. “Remember: a wife may save her husband; and a husband may save his wife.” (7:16, REB)

There is a greater likelihood, though, that the questions are more directly linked to the situation where the unbeliever leaves the believer, as suggested by the conjunction “for.” The thought appears to be that there is no way for a believing wife or husband to know whether the unbelieving mate would become a disciple of God’s Son and be saved from the condemnation to which sin leads. This, then, would be another reason for not trying to hinder the unbeliever from leaving. “But God has called you to live in peace: as a wife, how can you tell whether you are to be the salvation of your husband; as a husband, how can you tell whether you are to be the salvation of your wife?” (7:15, 16; NJB) “After all, God chose you and wants you to live at peace. And besides, how do you know if you will be able to save your husband or wife who isn’t a follower?” (7:15, 16; CEV)

Believers should regard their lot, portion, or station in life as one “the Lord” has given them. Their Lord Jesus Christ has not regarded it as needful to effect a change in their circumstances to make their service to him more acceptable. His Father called them or invited them to be his people in the state in which they continued to find themselves. Accordingly, it was right for believers to “walk” or to conduct themselves in keeping with the state in which God had called them. This is the guiding principle Paul set forth in all the congregations or the communities of believers to which he had ministered. (7:17; see the Notes section.)

If a man was called as one circumcised, he should not seek to become uncircumcised. Likewise the uncircumcised one should not conclude that he must get circumcised. Neither the circumcised nor the uncircumcised state means anything in relation to how God regards persons who accept his Son. What does count is whether believers observe God’s commandments. (7:18, 19)

Believers should remain in the condition or state in which they were individually called, not resorting to extraordinary means to force changes. (7:20) If a person was called while a slave, he should not let that be a cause for concern or worry. (7:21)

After introducing the thought about the possibility of becoming free, Paul directed his words to a slave, “rather use.” This could mean that the slave should use his present circumstances to the full. Another possibility is that, if he can rightfully obtain his freedom, he should do so, affording him more opportunities in the service of the Lord Jesus Christ. (7:21) Translations convey both meanings in their renderings. “Even if you can gain your freedom, make use of your present condition now more than ever.” (NRSV) “Even if you have a chance of freedom, you should prefer to make full use of your condition as a slave.” (NJB) “Though if a chance of freedom should come, by all means take it.” (REB) “But if you can win your freedom, you should.” (CEV)

For a slave, his condition of servitude had no bearing on his relationship to the Son of God. He had been called “in the Lord” while a slave in order to enjoy this new relationship. The calling “in the Lord” may denote being invited to a life of fellowship with him. A slave who was thus called to be at one with the Lord Jesus Christ would then be his freedman, one set free from enslavement to sin and granted the noble standing of a son of God and a person who belonged to Christ as his Lord. The one who enjoyed the status of a free man, never having been a slave, would likewise have a new relationship as one belonging to Christ as his servant or slave. (7:22)

All believers share the same dignified standing as servants or slaves of God and Christ. This is because all of them were bought with a price, the precious blood of the Son of God who sacrificed his life for them. As divinely owned persons, believers should not become slaves of men, granting them the kind of authority over them to which only God and Christ have the right. In view of their new relationship as children of God and as his and his Son's servants or slaves, believers should remain in the state or condition in which he has called them to belong to him, not attempting to force a change in status. (7:23, 24)

### **7:25-40 Married vs. the unmarried state**

#### **Verses 25-31. The general principle**

Regarding virgins, the apostle did not have any specific teaching or command from the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, based on the mercy the Lord had shown him, commissioning him as an apostle to the nations because of regarding him as trustworthy, Paul gave his opinion. (Compare 1 Timothy 1:12-14.) His view would have been that of a dependable apostle who was keenly aware of the need to be guided by God's spirit. (7:25)

On account of the then-existing difficult situation (*anánke*, meaning "necessity," "constraint," "pressure," or "distress"), Paul thought it good for a man to remain in the state in which he found himself. If bound to a wife, he should not seek a separation. As for a man who was free from a wife, he should not be looking for one. If, however, the unmarried man chose to marry, he would not be sinning. Likewise, if a virgin married, she would not be committing sin. (7:26-28)

Nevertheless, marriage would not be without problems. As Paul indicated, those who married would have "distress" in the "flesh." He wanted to spare fellow believers, encouraging them to remain single if this would not pose a problem for them on account of the prevalence of sexual immorality in the world. The "distress" for those who married included the cares and concerns for a marriage mate and children, especially when experiencing sickness in the family or facing situations that would make obtaining life's necessities difficult. Believers often faced persecution. Their homes might be plundered or they could even be forced to flee. Marriage mates, parents, and children could be separated because one or more of the family were imprisoned. At times, Christ's disciples were tortured or even killed. (7:28)

The apostle did not know when Jesus Christ would return in glory, but he had firm faith that this would take place. Possibly the existing circumstances prompted him to conclude that the time was short, or he may have referred to the

shortness of the time to express certainty about what lay ahead. At any rate, the instability in the human sphere makes it essential for believers to live their lives with a measure of detachment, for relationships and circumstances can change very quickly. (7:29)

Paul advised that married men be as though they had no wives, that mourners be as persons who did not weep, that joyful persons be as those not rejoicing, that buyers be as individuals who did not possess what they purchased, that those using what the world had to offer as persons who did not make full use of the world. The apostle recommended this course because the “form [*schéma*] of this world is passing.” (7:29-31)

### **Verses 32-40 Contrast between the married and unmarried state**

The transitoriness of everything related to human life makes it advisable for believers not to become unduly attached to whatever is subject to change. Unforeseen occurrences can deprive one of friends and loved ones. Neither times of sorrow or joy continue indefinitely. If possessions are not lost, they will eventually wear out. Believers live in the world, and so make use of what human society makes available. The apostle’s admonition is not to use the world to the full, probably meaning not to become totally absorbed in the mundane affairs of life but to limit one’s focus to essentials. (7:29-31)

In the earthly sphere, humans find themselves as on a stage with ever-changing backdrops and props. The Greek word *schéma* can denote the “form,” “outward appearance,” “shape,” or “aspect.” In its present form, the world or everything that makes up the human sphere is continually changing or passing away. (7:31)

Paul wanted fellow believers to be as free from worry or anxiety as possible, attaining this objective by limiting their attachments. The unmarried man is anxious or concerned about the Lord’s matters, how he might please Jesus Christ his Lord. A married man has additional anxieties or concerns relating to the world or the human sphere, how he might please his wife. As a result, “he is divided.” It is not possible for him to focus exclusively on pleasing his Lord. (7:32-34)

Likewise an unmarried woman or a virgin can be anxious or concerned about the affairs of the Lord. This would be by maintaining a holy or pure state in body and in spirit, not defiling her body through sinful acts or her spirit by manifesting an improper disposition (envy, jealousy, a lack of love or compassion). A married woman, like a married man, has additional cares and

concerns. She is anxious about the affairs of the world or matters pertaining to the sphere of human existence, desiring to please her husband. (7:34)

When referring to singleness as preferable, Paul did not mean to put a restraint on fellow believers as one might put a noose on an animal, endeavouring thereby to stop them from getting married. His objective was to set forth thoughts that could benefit them when they considered what would be the better course for them personally and, if possible, to choose the one he recommended. Under the existing circumstances, the state of singleness would have been appropriate and would have permitted them to be fully devoted to the Lord Jesus Christ, free from the added concerns that attended married life. (7:35)

There is considerable uncertainty about the situation Paul had in mind when referring to someone who thought he was acting inappropriately (*aschemonéo*) toward his “virgin” (*parthénos*). While the “someone” is a man, there is a question regarding his relationship to the virgin. (7:36)

A view that has not gained wide acceptance takes the Greek word *parthénos* to denote “virginity” and so represents Paul as speaking of an unmarried man’s own virginity. This seems unlikely. In Greek, the word for “virginity” is *parthenía* (found in Luke 2:36), and one would expect the apostle to have used this term if that is what he had meant. (7:36)

Translators have commonly represented the virgin as a young woman to whom the man is engaged. “If anyone thinks that he is not behaving properly toward his fiancée, if his passions are strong [*hypérakmos*], and so it has to be, let him marry as he wishes; it is no sin. Let them marry. But if someone stands firm in his resolve, being under no necessity but having his own desire under control, and has determined in his own mind to keep her as his fiancée, he will do well. So then, he who marries his fiancée does well; and he who refrains from marriage will do better.” (NRSV) “But if a man feels that he is not behaving properly towards the girl to whom he is betrothed, if his passions are strong and something must be done, let him carry out his intention by getting married; there is nothing wrong in it. But if a man is steadfast in his purpose and under no obligation, if he is free to act at his own discretion, and has decided in his own mind to respect her virginity, he will do well. Thus he who marries his betrothed does well, and he who does not marry does better.” (REB) “But suppose you are engaged to someone old enough to be married, and you want her so much that all you can think about is getting married. Then go ahead and marry. There is nothing wrong with that. But it is better to have self-control and to make up your mind not to marry. It is perfectly all right to marry, but it is better not to get

married at all.” (CEV) The Greek text, however, is not as definitive as these renderings of 1 Corinthians 7:36-38 would suggest.

From the Greek text, one cannot determine whether the adjective *hypérakmos* (literally, “above the acme”) applies to the man or the virgin. When describing the virgin it has been understood to mean “past the prime” or “past marriageable age.” Translations that render the verse to apply to the man opt for such meanings as “strong passions” or “at one’s sexual prime,” basing this on the meaning of “exceedingly” for the prefix *hypér*. Moreover, the context is not clear about the nature of the inappropriate thinking toward the virgin. The Greek word *aschemonéo* does not in itself have a sexual connotation but refers to acting in a manner that is contrary to an accepted standard. (7:36)

Among the Jews and others in the Greco-Roman world, the accepted standard for virgins was for them to get married. So there is a possibility that Paul described a situation involving a father and his virgin daughter. This view is reflected in alternate renderings of 1 Corinthians 7:36-38 found in the footnotes of various translations. “If you feel that you are not treating your grown daughter right by keeping her from getting married, then let her marry. You won’t be doing anything wrong. But it is better to have self-control and make up your mind not to let your daughter get married. It is all right for you to let her marry. But it is better if you don’t let her marry at all.” (CEV, footnote) “Still, if there is anyone who feels that it would not be fair to his daughter to let her grow too old for marriage, and that he should do something about it, he is free to do as he likes: he is not sinning if there is a marriage. On the other hand, if someone has firmly made his mind up, without any compulsion and in complete freedom of choice, to keep his daughter as she is, he will be doing a good thing. In other words, the man who sees that his daughter is married has done a good thing, but the man who keeps his daughter unmarried has done something even better.” (NJB, footnote)

If the words of 1 Corinthians 7:36-38 apply to a father and his virgin daughter, the man who decided not to give her in marriage would be one who was settled in his “heart” (meaning either his mind or within himself) and had “authority” or full control over “his own will,” not feeling pressured by the prevailing views in the community. The determination not to give his daughter in marriage would be a resolve of his “own heart” or his own inner conviction. He would not be a father with the kind of concerns expressed in the book of Sirach (42:9, 10, NRSV), “A daughter is a secret anxiety to her father, and worry over her robs him of sleep; when she is young, for fear she may not marry, or if married, for fear she may be disliked; while a virgin, for fear she may be seduced and



become pregnant in her father's house." (See the Notes section for a literal reading of 7:36-38.)

Regardless of the specific situation involving the virgin, the main point is that Paul recommended the unmarried state as the preferable one. The Corinthians would have understood the specifics. Culturally, we today are not in the same situation, and the precise application of the apostle's words is immaterial. There is, however, no ambiguity about his view of singleness and the clarity with which he identified thoughts that represented his opinion as an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the case of a married woman, she is bound to her husband for as long as he lives. His death would free her to marry another man if she chose to do so. For a believing widow, remarriage should be "in the Lord," meaning that it would be a marriage to a fellow believer who was at one with the Lord Jesus Christ. According to Paul's opinion, the widow would be happier if she did not marry. When expressing this opinion, the apostle believed that he had God's spirit and so his words agreed with the spirit's guidance. (7:39, 40)

#### **Notes:**

In 1 Corinthians 7:3, a few later manuscripts read *opheiloménen eúnoian* ("owing benevolence"), which would not be limited to conjugal dues.

The oldest extant manuscripts and quite a number of others read "brother" in 1 Corinthians 7:14, but numerous later manuscripts say "man" or are more specific in identifying the man as believing.

In 1 Corinthians 7:17, many later manuscripts refer to "God" (not "the Lord") as apportioning each one's lot and then "the Lord" (not "God") as doing the calling. Instead of *diatássomai* ("I order" or "I command"), a number of manuscripts read *didásko* ("I teach").

A literal reading of 1 Corinthians 7:36-38 would be, "But if anyone thinks inappropriately about his virgin, if being beyond the prime, and so it ought to be, what he wants to do, let him do; he is not sinning. Let them marry. But one who stands settled in [his] heart, not having necessity, but having authority over his own will, and this he has judged in his own heart, to keep his own virgin, he will do well. So also the one giving in marriage does well, and the one not giving in marriage will do better."

In Book V of *The Republic*, the Greek philosopher Plato presents a discussion wherein Socrates expresses his views about the acme of life. In this discussion

the question is raised, “What is the prime of life?” The answer follows in the form of a question, “May it not be defined as a period of about twenty years in a woman’s life, and thirty years in a man’s?” Subsequent comments reveal that a woman was regarded as being past her prime when her childbearing years ended at the age of forty. A man was considered past the prime of physical and intellectual vigour at the age of fifty-five.

In the Greco-Roman world, widows of childbearing age were expected to marry again. In view of Paul’s letter to Timothy encouraging younger widows to marry (1 Timothy 5:14) , it would appear that his statement about widows to the Corinthians (7:39, 40) applies to older widows. Among the Romans, it was regarded as honourable for women to have been faithful to one husband for their whole life, with inscriptions on tombstones including the word *univira* (of one husband). A late first-century BCE inscription (known as the *Laudatio Turiae*) contains the husband’s praise of his deceased wife, a woman to whom the designation *univira* applied. Regarding the marriage, the inscription reads, “Marriages as long as ours are rare, marriages that are ended by death and not broken by divorce. For we were fortunate enough to see our marriage last without disharmony for fully 40 years.” (Translated by E. Wistrand)



*Statue of Demeter, the mother goddess who personified the natural processes of fertility and growth*

## **1 Corinthians 8:1-13**

### **8. Christian liberty**

#### **Verses 1-3. The law of love the solution**

Regarding food offered to idols, believers had the “knowledge” that idols were powerless, lifeless representations. This knowledge in itself did not assure right conduct, for, as Paul continued, “Knowledge inflates, but love builds up.” One who has certain knowledge may look down on others as ignorant, and so knowledge can breed conceit and contempt. Love, on the other hand, is reflected in a kindly view of fellow humans and a compassionate regard for their limitations. The loving person does not make others feel low and despised but builds them up, showing consideration for their feelings and treating them as valued people. (8:1)

If individuals imagine they know something (without being guided by love), they do not know it as they should. Apart from love (a selfless interest in the happiness and welfare of fellow humans), knowledge can be hurtful, with its possessors assuming an arrogant bearing toward others, treating them in a contemptuous manner, or failing to consider their feelings and limitations. (8:2)

“But if anyone loves God, this [person] is known by him.” God acknowledges as his own only those who love him, and this love is demonstrated by treating others in a loving manner. In the case of believers, this especially requires demonstrating love for fellow children of God. (8:3)

#### **Verses 4-13. The law of knowledge inadequate**

Continuing to comment about eating food offered to idols, Paul added, “We know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is but one God.” Representations of deities are lifeless objects of human manufacture and cannot produce any change in meat or any other food from an offering. The deities that the lifeless images represent are nonexistent, for there is only one living God. (8:4)

In the Greco-Roman world, there were many so-called gods, “whether in heaven or on earth.” Among millions today, this is still the case. Many who have no knowledge of the true God (or do not recognize him) revere deities which they believe to exist in the earthly and the super-terrestrial realms. (8:5)

Although there are “many gods and many lords,” followers of Christ recognize only “one God, the Father, from whom all things are and we for him, and one

Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things are and we through him.” The Father is the ultimate source of everything. Believers live for him. Jesus Christ, their Lord, is the one through whom the Father brought everything into being. The concluding phrase (“and we through him”) could point to the fact that believers owe their identity as children of God to Christ. They are what they are through Jesus Christ and what he accomplished when dying sacrificially. (8:5, 6)

In the first century, many did not know or recognize that an idol was a nothing thing and that only one true God existed. Before becoming believers, certain ones among the Corinthians when eating food offered to idols had done so with a worshipful regard for the idol. Even though they had become disciples of God’s Son, they still had a weak conscience, one that was defiled because they had formerly been conditioned to believe in the existence of the deity that the idol represented. For this reason, they could not eat any food that had once been offered to an idol without the feelings and thoughts associated with their past life as idolaters. (8:7)

“But food will not make us stand before [*parístemi*] God.” The Greek word *parístemi* can signify to “stand before,” “place beside,” “bring before,” or “present.” The thought could be that food will not bring one closer to God. Another possibility is that food will not bring one before God so as to be judged on that basis. The reason food would neither bring one nearer to God or cause one to stand before him for judgment is because the act of eating a certain food has no bearing on one’s relationship with him. Paul added, “If we do not eat, we are not worse off; if we eat, we are not better off.” (8:8)

Whereas eating or refraining from eating certain food was immaterial, this did not mean one did not need to be considerate of others. The apostle admonished the Corinthians to watch or to exercise care that they did not make use of their “authority” or right to eat certain food in a way that could result in putting an obstacle before those with a weak conscience, causing them to sin. (8:9)

If a believer with a weak conscience observed a fellow believer who had “knowledge” (the specific knowledge that an idol was a nothing thing that could not in any way make food different because of having been part of an offering) eating a meal at an “idol temple” (probably meaning one of the dining rooms in the temple courtyard), this could be spiritually ruinous to the one with a weak conscience. It could encourage him to the point of actually eating food offered to idols. His previous idolatrous conditioning would bring back the same thoughts and feelings he had before he became a believer, and his eating would then prove to be an idolatrous act. (8:10)

In this way, the other individual's "knowledge" (without the guidance of love) would have brought ruin to the one with a weak conscience. This would have been very serious. The believer who failed to take the weak conscience of a fellow believer into consideration would have made himself responsible for causing his brother to sin, a brother for whom Christ died. The brother with the weak conscience belonged to Christ and was very precious to him. (8:11)

If any of the Corinthians thus sinned against their brothers and wounded their weak consciences, they would have made themselves guilty of sinning against Christ. The brothers with weak consciences were fellow children of God and members of the body of which Christ is the head. (8:12; see the Notes section.)

Pointing to his own course of action, Paul highlighted the right course to take. If food could cause his brother to stumble, being led to commit sin, he would never again eat meat. Out of loving concern for the spiritual well-being of his brother, a fellow member of God's family, the apostle would willingly forgo what he had the right to do. (8:13)

#### **Notes:**

The oldest extant manuscript (P46) contains an abbreviated version of 1 Corinthians 8:3, "But if anyone loves, this one is known."

In 1 Corinthians 8:12, the oldest extant Greek manuscript (P46) does not include the word for "weak" when mentioning the conscience.

### **1 Corinthians 9:1-27**

#### **9. The church and its workers**

##### **Verses 1-15. Church leaders are to be honoured and supported**

In all aspects of his service as an apostle, Paul never insisted on his rights. It appears that his detractors tried to use this against him in efforts to discredit him. Therefore, with pointed questions, the Scriptures, and Jesus' teaching, the apostle provided the answer to those who were making a wrong assessment of him and his course of action.

"Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord?" Paul did have the freedom to make use of the rights he had as an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ. On his way to Damascus, he had his encounter with the risen Lord and received his commission. Paul's having seen Jesus proved that he was indeed an apostle. Moreover, the Corinthians had

become believers through his ministry. Their being Paul's "work in the Lord" could mean that they were the product of his labors for the Lord. It is also possible that the expression "in the Lord" applies to the believers in Corinth. As the apostle's work, they were "in the Lord" or at one with the Lord as members of his body. (9:1)

From the standpoint of communities of believers where Paul had not ministered, he would not have been an apostle directly for them, but he was indeed an apostle to the Corinthians. As the ones who had become believers through his ministry, they were the "seal" of his apostleship "in the Lord." The Corinthians as a community of believers, like a seal, constituted authentic proof of Paul's being in the service of the Lord Jesus Christ as an apostle with a divine commission. (9:2)

To those who wrongly judged him, Paul directed his defense. (9:3)

"Do we not have the authority to eat and drink?" As an apostle, he had the right to be the recipient of meals in the homes of those to whom he ministered. (9:4)

"Do we not have the authority to lead a sister as a wife, even as the rest of the apostles and the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas?" (9:5) Paul did have the right to be married to a "sister" (a believing wife) and to have her share the hospitality extended to him. The believing wives of other apostles accompanied them. This was also true of the "Lord's brothers," among whom James was the most prominent. His brother Jude, the writer of the letter bearing his name, was also married. In the second century CE, Hegesippus wrote about the grandsons of Jude in connection with an incident during Domitian's reign, "And there still survived of the Lord's family the grandsons of Jude, who was said to be His brother, humanly speaking. These were informed against as being of David's line." (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, III, 20 [translated by G. A. Williamson])

Although the designation "apostles" applied to any of the surviving twelve and apostles of various congregations, Paul mentioned Cephas (the Semitic equivalent for the Greek name Peter) separately. He was a married man at the time he became one of Jesus' disciples, and his mother-in-law was then living in the home he shared with his brother Andrew. (Mark 1:29, 30) Possibly because Cephas or Peter was well-known to the Corinthians, Paul chose to mention him by name. (9:5)

Paul and Barnabas worked in order to support themselves. The other apostles to whom Paul referred depended on those to whom they ministered to supply life's

necessities. In view of this, he raised the question, “Do only I and Barnabas not have the authority not to work?” (9:6)

To prove that he and Barnabas had the same right as the others to refrain from working to obtain life’s essentials, Paul reasoned with the Corinthians on the basis of examples from ordinary life and the Mosaic law. “Who ever soldiers at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit? Or who shepherds a flock and does not partake from the milk of the flock?” (9:7) The Corinthians would not have doubted that those who rendered services were entitled to benefit from the work they performed.

Paul did not just speak on the basis of customary practice among humans. With a question he introduced the point that the law also says what can be observed regarding benefits, rewards, or wages from work. “Does not also the law say these things?” (9:8)

The apostle next referred to what is written in “the law of Moses,” quoting from Deuteronomy 25:4 (LXX), which passage contains the command not to muzzle a threshing bovine. Regarding this command, Paul raised the questions, “Is the bovine the concern to God? Or is it altogether for our sakes it says [this]? Indeed for our sakes it has been written.” This, as Paul continued, would be because both the one ploughing and the one threshing ought to do so in the hope of sharing in the result of the labour at harvest time. (9:9, 10; see the Notes section.)

The apostle knew the Scriptures well. So it is inconceivable that he meant that God cares nothing about animals, which is not a thought the Scriptures support. (Compare Psalm 104:10-22; Jonah 4:11.) Cattle were not to be tormented by being prevented from eating some of the grain they were threshing. The law, however, was not committed to writing for animals that could neither read nor understand its requirements. It was given to the Israelites as an expression of God’s loving concern for them, and they were to benefit from its teaching. Accordingly, if consideration was to be shown to animals, how much more so should this be true of humans! Those labouring should rightly expect recompense for their work, and this is evident from the law that prohibited the Israelites from muzzling threshing bovines.

Applying the principle to the labour expended in furthering the cause of Christ, Paul made the point that the spiritual sowing he did while with the Corinthians would give him the right to partake of their “fleshly” or material things. There would be nothing “great” or out of the ordinary for Paul to have shared in the “fleshly things” of their “harvest,” or the material things (primarily life’s

necessities) that they had been able to obtain through their labours. Others had made use of this authority or right. Appropriately, then, Paul could ask whether he, even more so, would not be entitled to do so. (9:11, 12; see the Notes section.)

He, however, did not avail himself of this right but willingly carried his own burden, labouring with his hands to support himself. Paul did this to avoid anything that might hinder “the evangel of Christ.” He did not want anyone to think that his labour in making known the glad tidings about the Son of God had material gain as its object. The apostle was very concerned that, as far as depended upon him, nothing would distract from the message about Jesus Christ and what he accomplished in sacrificing his life. (9:12)

Continuing to emphasize his right to receive material support, Paul, with a question, reminded the Corinthians that those working at the temple ate from a portion of the offerings, as did those who officiated at the altar. (9:13) Likewise, the Lord Jesus Christ directed that those who proclaimed the evangel or the good news about him should “live” by it, or be supported by their labour in proclaiming it. (9:14) When Jesus Christ sent out his disciples, he told them not to take any provisions with them, but to rely on the hospitality of responsive ones for their needs. (Luke 10:4-7)

Paul, though fully entitled to receive material support, chose to perform manual work for life’s necessities. Moreover, he did not write about this matter so as to start making use of his rights. Expressing himself strongly regarding his position about not seeking material aid, he told the Corinthians that it would be better for him to die than to do so. He did not want anyone to deprive him of his basis for boasting, or for taking pride in his course of action. This was no false pride on the apostle’s part, but he had the satisfaction of knowing that no one could legitimately accuse him of carrying out his ministry for material gain. (9:15)

### **Verses 16-27. True church leaders are to be rewarded**

He would not have the same reason for “boasting” or taking pride in what he was doing if he had procured his means of living from proclaiming the evangel. As a divinely commissioned apostle, he regarded himself as compelled to declare the good news about Christ. Knowing that his failing to do so would merit severe judgment, Paul added, “For woe is to me if I did not preach the evangel.” (9:16)

If he proclaimed the glad tidings willingly or gladly, he would obtain a reward. Paul would then experience the joy and satisfaction resulting from having been



rightly motivated to discharge his ministry in the service of Christ of his own free will. If, on the other hand, he really did not want to do the work, he would still be under the obligation of the stewardship entrusted to him. Therefore, even if he had been unwilling to carry out his assignment (as was, for example, the prophet Jonah), he would not have been discharged from his duty. (9:17)

The mere discharge of an obligation would not have been rewarding. So, fittingly, Paul raised the question, “What then is my reward?” It was to proclaim the evangel without cost, not making use of his right for financial support, so as not to abuse his authority as one entrusted with the message about Christ. For Paul, the non-obligatory choice of not making full use of his rights proved to be his reward, one to which he could point with proper pride as evidence of his unconditional willingness and sincerity when laboring to further the interests of Christ. (9:18)

The apostle was not the servant or slave of any human. With reference to all, he was free. For the purpose of advancing Christ’s cause, though, he had made himself the slave of all in order to gain the most persons possible. (9:19) In matters that had no bearing on faithfulness to God and Christ, Paul willingly chose not to avail himself of his rights but showed consideration for the scruples and feelings of others and complied with the customs of the people among whom he laboured. When with Jews, he conducted himself as a Jew in order to gain them for the Son of God. To those who considered themselves bound by the law, he proved to be like a man who was likewise under its obligations. This was a willing choice on his part, for he knew that he was not under the law. His approved standing before God rested on faith in Christ, not law observance. Nevertheless, to win those who were under the law, he proved to be to them as one who was likewise under the law. (9:20; compare Acts 16:3; 21:20-26)

Among the non-Jewish peoples who were not under the law, Paul lived as one not bound by the law. He freely associated with Gentiles, making no distinction between Jew and non-Jew in his personal interactions. In his impartial dealings with them when sharing the good news about Christ, his objective was to win them. This did not mean that Paul conducted himself in a lawless manner. He lived uprightly as a servant of God and not as a person without God’s law. The apostle’s exemplary life demonstrated his being under the law of Christ. For Paul, the commands, teaching, and example of the Son of God were the law he faithfully followed. (9:21)

To the weak, those with a sensitive conscience and scruples that would have been immaterial to him, Paul came to be like one of them to gain them. He came to be “weak” from the standpoint of showing consideration for their limitations,

not insisting on his rights. (Compare Romans 14:1-3; 15:1, 2; 1 Corinthians 8:13.) To help others to come to salvation through faith in Christ, Paul proved himself to be all things to all people, willingly and gladly foregoing his personal rights. (9:22)

In everything he did, the apostle acted for the sake of the evangel or the glad tidings about the Son of God, desiring to become a “sharer of it.” His actions were always consistent with his objective to advance the cause of Christ. (9:23)

Paul’s role as a “sharer” of the evangel may either be as one who would participate in the blessings or benefits resulting from faith in the good news about Christ or as one who would be making the message known to others. Modern translations commonly make the meaning explicit in their renderings. “I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings.” (NRSV) “I do all this for the good news, because I want to share in its blessings.” (CEV) “All this I do for the sake of the gospel, that I may share its benefits with others.” (NJB) “I do all this for the sake of the Gospel; I want to play my part in it properly.” (J. B. Phillips) The Greek term for “sharer” (*synkoinonós*) can designate a fellow partner or participant, and this may favour the meaning of one who shares in the benefits or blessings the message about Christ offers to those who respond to it in faith. (9:23) “And I do everything for the sake of the Good News, that I may share with my hearers in its benefits.” (Weymouth)

The course that Paul pursued in his ministry required real effort and self-discipline. This appears to be the reason for the comments that follow, likening the life course of believers to that of participants in athletic contests. All those in the race would run, but only one would receive the prize of victory. In the case of believers, winning in their race (their life course distinguished by faithfulness to God and Christ) is not limited to one victor, but exertion is essential. Paul urged, “Run in order to receive [the prize or the divinely promised reward].” (9:24)

In preparation for athletic contests, the participants had to exercise self-control in everything, adhering to a strict regimen and submitting to supervised training under circumstances that were more difficult than would be faced during the actual events. The athletes were willing to do this for the prospect of winning and being crowned with a victory wreath fashioned from perishable plant material (wild olive leaves, pine foliage, laurel, or wild celery). Instead of a perishable garland, believers have an incorruptible victory crown awaiting them at the end of a life course completed in faithfulness. They will be rewarded with the enjoyment of life in the sinless state and share in all the benefits and

blessings that have been divinely promised to those who remain loyal to God and Christ. (9:25)

With reference to his own exertions, Paul indicated that he did not run without an aim or purpose. He was not like a boxer throwing punches in the air. (9:26) Instead, he exercised control over his body as though beating (*hypopiázo*) it into subjection and leading it as a slave. Paul was concerned about an exemplary life course, exerting himself with all the strength that he could muster to maintain it. He did not want to be found personally disapproved after having preached to others, telling them the glad tidings about Christ and urging them to repent and to become his disciples. (9:27)

### Notes:

The wording of the Septuagint in Deuteronomy 25:4 and that of the quotation in 1 Corinthians 9:9 are the same in numerous manuscripts, including P46 (c. 200). Other manuscripts contain a different term for the Greek word meaning “muzzle.”

The Greek word for “says” (*légo*), at the end of verse 10, is third person singular and could be rendered either “it says” or “he says.” If the verb is to be understood to mean “he says,” the reference could be either to God or to Moses. In case the meaning should be “it says,” the application would be to the law or Torah.

In verses 11 and 12, the Greek verbs are first person plural. The context indicates that Paul referred to himself when using the editorial “we.”

The words of 1 Corinthians 9:15, “I did not make use of any of these [things],” are ambiguous. There is no specific plural antecedent for the neuter “these.” Translators have commonly rendered the verse as indicating “right” or “rights” to be the implied antecedent, but the Greek word for “authority” or “right” the apostle used is the singular feminine noun *exousía*. Perhaps “these” may be understood to include Jesus’ directive and the examples Paul had previously mentioned to show what he, as an apostle, would have been entitled to do.

According to the oldest extant manuscripts, the concluding part of 1 Corinthians 9:15 reads, “my boasting no one will nullify.” It is commonly believed that the varied readings of later manuscripts, including “that anyone should nullify my boasting,” are scribal corrections.

The Greek word *anánke* (in 1 Corinthians 9:16) conveys the compulsion Paul felt about declaring the glad tidings concerning Christ. This term denotes

“need,” “necessity,” “constraint,” or “pressure.” The prophet Jeremiah expressed himself somewhat similarly when speaking of the pressure he felt to proclaim the word of YHWH despite the intense hostility he faced, “If I say, ‘I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name,’ then within me there is something like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot.” (Jeremiah 20:9, NRSV)

In 1 Corinthians 9:20, later manuscripts omit Paul’s mentioning that he was not under the law.

Instead of “but I do all things,” later manuscripts read (in 1 Corinthians 9:23), “but this I do.”

In 1 Corinthians 9:25, Paul’s use of first person plural pronoun “we” does not appear to be intended in the editorial sense but likely is meant to include fellow believers.

The Greek word *hypopiázo* (in 1 Corinthians 9:27) means to “give one a black eye” or to “strike one in the face” and is suggestive of very harsh treatment.

## **1 Corinthians 10:1-33**

### **10:1-15. The church’s heritage**

#### **Verses 1-5. Old Testament typology and its lessons**

Drawing on the example of what befell the Israelites after their deliverance from Egypt, Paul illustrated the need for the Corinthians to exert themselves to remain faithful to God and Christ. The apostle did not want his “brothers,” fellow believers in Corinth, to be “ignorant” or to lose sight of the ancient events and the significance of these to them personally. The reference to “our fathers” could be understood as Paul’s speaking from the standpoint of a Jewish believer or his including the non-Jewish believers as having become part of the true Israel, with Abraham (by virtue of his faith) being the “father” of all believers. (Compare Romans 4:11; Galatians 3:7; Philippians 3:3.) Regarding “our fathers,” Paul said that all of them were “under the cloud and passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.” (10:1, 2)

When the sea opened up, allowing the Israelites to cross to escape the Egyptian pursuers, water was on both sides of their path. The column of cloud that had been in front of them passed over them, and took its place behind them. In this way, they came to be under the cloud, and they passed through the sea, with its waters forming a wall on their right and their left. (Exodus 14:19-22) So, “in the

cloud” that moved over them and “in the sea” through which they passed, all the people were baptized “into Moses,” being united as a corporate body to him as their leader or head and YHWH’s unique “servant.” (Exodus 14:31)

Thereafter, in the wilderness, “all ate the same spiritual food.” As a miraculous provision, manna had a spiritual source and thus proved to be a spiritual provision for sustaining the Israelites. (10:3)

“All drank the same spiritual drink, for they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was the Christ.” The Israelites received a miraculous supply of water from a rock at the beginning of their journey in the wilderness and then years later in another location at the close of their wilderness wandering. (Exodus 17:6; Numbers 20:11) So it appeared as if the rock from which the water had been miraculously obtained had followed them. (10:4)

According to the view of ancient rabbis, the rock accompanied the Israelites. The Tosefta (*Sukkah* 3:11, Jacob Neusner’s translation) says, “The well which was with the Israelites in the wilderness was a rock, the size of a large round vessel, surging and gurgling upward, as from the mouth of this little flask, rising with them up onto the mountains, and going down with them into the valleys. Wherever the Israelites would encamp, it made camp with them, on a high place, opposite the entry of the Tent of Meeting.” Whether Paul expressed himself about the rock from the standpoint of what appeared to be the case or with an allusion to ancient rabbinical thought cannot be determined from the context. He did, however, make use of typology, identifying the “rock” with Christ, the source of living water for all who put faith in him. (10:4)

In the case of the Israelites, the miraculously provided water had a spiritual source and could be regarded as life-sustaining spiritual drink. Through Christ, believers receive spiritual water, a provision that is essential for eternal life, the life of an enduring relationship with him and his Father. Although not explicitly stating that the Father, in his dealings with the Israelites, used his Son (the “Word” in his prehuman existence [John 1:1]), Paul may have had this thought in mind when saying that the “rock was the Christ.” (10:4)

All of the Israelites had been highly favoured, being baptized into Moses and thereafter partaking of divinely provided food and drink, but most of them lost God’s approval and perished in the wilderness. (10:5) With the exception of Caleb, Joshua, and members of the tribe of Levi, the older generation that had left Egypt did not enter the Promised Land but died in the wilderness. (Numbers 26:57-65; 32:11, 12)

## **Verses 6-15 The warning**

Developments among the Israelites served as “types” or examples, providing a warning to believers who had been baptized into one greater than Moses, the unique Son of God. By reason of their faith in Jesus Christ, they had become partakers of true spiritual food and drink. This did not mean they could be careless. Rather, they needed to be diligent in avoiding the kind of actions that caused the Israelites to lose God’s approval. (10:6)

In the wilderness, the Israelites began to desire bad things. They complained about not having the meat and other food they had enjoyed while in Egypt. Then, when quail in abundance flew into the camp, the people manifested wanton craving and killed more birds than they could possibly have eaten. (Numbers 11:4, 31-34; Psalm 106:14) A similar danger of giving in to a desire for bad faced the Corinthian believers. They may have looked back on their previous life, complaining about missing out on the sumptuous banquets associated with idolatrous practices. They needed to resist any desire for the tempting morsels. (10:6)

The Corinthians should have been on guard against idolatry, remembering what happened to the Israelites shortly after they left Egypt. As part of the festivities associated with the veneration of a golden calf, they seated themselves “to eat and drink” and then “got up to play.” (Exodus 32:6; see the Notes section.) The Corinthians needed to resist any longing for idolatrous feasting and the entertainment associated with the festivities. (10:7)

Sexual immorality proved to be a common feature of idolatry. At the temple of Aphrodite in Corinth, hundreds of temple prostitutes offered their services. In the case of the Israelites shortly before entering the Promised Land, many of the men, in connection with religious rites, were lured into having sexual relations with Moabite and Midianite women. As a result, 23,000 men perished in one day. (Numbers 25:1, 2, 5; see the Notes section.) In view of the environment in which the Corinthians found themselves, they had good reason to take seriously the warning example the Israelite men provided. (10:8)

Paul urged the Corinthians to avoid improper “testing.” Numerous manuscripts read, “Neither should we put the Christ to the test, as some of them tested him, and were destroyed by the serpents.” (10:9)

Instead of “Christ,” other manuscripts say “Lord” or “God.” Either “Lord” or “God” can be understood to refer to the Father, but “Christ” cannot. In the wilderness, the Israelites improperly tested God, murmuring with words that

implied that he could not care for them. Subsequent to this challenging of divine power to supply their needs, many of the Israelites were bitten by poisonous serpents and died. (Numbers 21:5, 6)

If “Christ” is the original reading in 1 Corinthians 10:9, possibly Paul used the term “Christ” or “anointed one” in the general sense. The Israelites spoke against God and Moses. So, in the case of the Israelites, the “anointed one” would have been Moses, whereas Jesus Christ” would have been the “anointed one” for the Corinthian believers. Another possibility is that the apostle regarded the Son of God as the one through whom the Father acted and so could speak of the Israelites as having tested Christ. For the Corinthians to speak resentfully of what they no longer were able to enjoy and to imply that they were worse off than formerly would have constituted an improper testing. It was imperative for them to shun any testing of this nature.

Paul admonished the Corinthians to avoid murmuring. In the wilderness, the Israelites murmured against Moses and Aaron, claiming that they had killed God’s people when divine judgment had been expressed against Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. Consequently, many Israelites perished by the “destroyer” or a divinely sent plague. (Numbers 16:1-49) Among the Corinthians, there were those who murmured against Paul, the divinely chosen apostle, and there may also have been a measure of murmuring about limitations the new way of life as disciples of Christ had imposed on them. Whatever improper murmuring existed should have been stopped. (10:10)

In an effort to aid the Corinthians to benefit from the warning example of the Israelites, Paul pointed out that these things were written to “instruct us, on whom the ends of the ages have arrived.” With the coming of Christ, a new age or era would dawn, bringing an end to everything associated with the world of sin that existed in past ages. For the Corinthians to share in the blessings of the age to come, they could not afford to disregard the warning lessons from Israelite history. (10:11)

Events from this history demonstrated that proud self-assurance had no place among believers. Those who imagine themselves to be standing should watch out that they do not fall. One should not presume on an approved standing with God and Christ, becoming careless regarding one’s conduct instead of remaining vigilant concerning upright living. (10:12)

The temptations the Israelites faced in the wilderness were those common to human experience and not of a nature that only angels could successfully resist. Likewise, whatever temptations the Corinthian believers had encountered

proved to be like those which humans commonly have. Nevertheless, the Corinthians were not left without any assistance to deal with temptations. “God is faithful,” dependable, or trustworthy, providing what is needed to remain loyal to him. Paul added, “He will not let you be tempted beyond your strength but, with the temptation, he will make the way out so that you may be able to endure.” The “way out” would come in the form of essential divine aid to avoid giving in to the pressure of the temptation, making it possible to endure as faithful servants of God and Christ. (10:13)

For the Corinthians, temptations were closely linked to idolatry. Understandably, therefore, Paul urged these beloved fellow believers to “flee from idolatry,” quickly getting away from it as one would from any serious danger. (10:14)

The apostle addressed the Corinthians as persons in possession of wisdom or discernment, capable of making proper evaluations. He invited them to judge what he said and then referred to aspects associated with the Lord’s supper, with a focus on shunning idolatry. (10:15)

### **10:16-33. The Lord’s Supper**



### **Verses 16-22. Fellowship at the Lord’s Table**

“The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing of the blood of the Christ? The [loaf of] bread that we break, is it not a sharing of the body of the Christ? Because [there is] one [loaf of] bread, we, the many, are one body, for all [of us] partake from the one [loaf of] bread.” When drinking from the cup containing the wine and over which a blessing had been said, believers revealed themselves to be “sharers of the blood of the Christ.” They were beneficiaries of the new



covenant that Christ had put into effect by means of his blood and which covenant made forgiveness of sins possible. On the basis of Christ's sacrificial death, believers came to be members of his composite body, the body of which he is the head. Their partaking of the one loaf, breaking the unleavened bread to eat it, proved to be concrete evidence of this reality. All present for the occasion partook of just one loaf of bread, indicating that the "many" were just one composite body. (10:16, 17)

Developing the point about the sharing, communion, or joint participation as it related to the "body of Christ" and the "blood of Christ," Paul called attention to the Jewish temple service and idolatrous sanctuary service. He wanted the Corinthians to "look" at or consider "Israel according to the flesh," or natural Israel (descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob). Those who ate of the sacrifices were "sharers of the altar." They were joint participants in a communal meal consisting of the portion that had been placed on the altar and the part of the sacrifice they ate. Thus, through the one sacrifice in which a group shared, they had communion with the altar, which was regarded as God's table. Accordingly, the worshipers could be viewed as having table fellowship with God as partakers of the same sacrificial victim. (10:18)

When it came to the sacrificial services at non-Jewish temples, something similar occurred. The apostle, though, wanted to make it clear that he was not attributing a real existence to the deities to whom sacrifices were being made. He continued, "What, then, am I saying? That food offered to idols is anything? Or that an idol is anything?" His rhetorical questions imply that neither what is offered to an idol nor the idol itself has any any significance or validity. No change was produced in any food offered to an idol, and the idol itself was just an object that human hands had fashioned. It was neither a real deity nor the representation of an existing god or goddess.

Being a veneration of nonexistent deities, idolatry is a counterfeit substitute for worship of the true God. It is a falsehood and an alternative option for worship that serves the interests of the powers of darkness. Idolatry stands in opposition to the only true God. For this reason, participation in idolatrous rights would constitute a sharing with demons or malevolent spirits. Therefore, as Paul expressed matters, the things sacrificed were not offered to God, but to demons, and the apostle did not want the Corinthians to become sharers with the demons. The Corinthian believers could become such if they were to involve themselves in participating in an idolatrous feast. (10:20)

Paul stressed to the Corinthians that, as believers, they could not drink of the "cup of the Lord" and also the "cup of demons," nor could they be partaking of

the “table of the Lord” and also the “table of demons.” (10:21) Participants at the idolatrous feasts drank wine from cups or bowls and ate food that had been offered to idols. For believers to have become active participants in the idolatrous feasts would have meant drinking from the “cup of demons” and partaking of the “table of demons.” This would have been inconsistent with their observance of the Lord’s supper, partaking of the wine and the unleavened bread in remembrance of his death and what it meant for them.

Paul raised the questions, “Are we inciting the Lord to jealousy? We are not stronger than he is, [are we]?” Believers have been bought with Christ’s precious blood, and are his servants. They owe him the honour and obedience that he deserves as their Lord. In thus honouring him and living in harmony with his example and teaching, they would also honour his Father. For believers to have attributed an existence to and honoured nonexistent deities by participating in idolatrous feasts would have been an affront both to the Lord Jesus Christ and his Father. It would have been an act of disloyalty or one provoking a justified jealousy for what rightly belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ. Such an inciting to jealousy would have been a foolhardy act of daring, for the Lord is the far stronger party. After his resurrection from the dead, he was granted all authority in heaven and on earth. (Matthew 28:18) For believers to have incited the Lord Jesus Christ to jealousy would also have constituted a provoking of his Father, the Most High God, to jealousy, resulting in becoming objects of divine anger. (10:22)

### Verses 23-33 The law of love and Christian liberty

## The Rite of the Lord’s Supper (KJV)

23: For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread:

24: And when he had given thanks (*the minister Word and Sacrament gives thanks, and says*), he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me.

25: After the same manner also he took the cup,( *the minister of Word and Sacrament continues saying*) when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.

26: For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.

27: Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.

28: But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.

29: For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.

30: For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.

31: For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged.

32: But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.

33: Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, tarry one for another.

34: And if any man hunger, let him eat at home; that ye come not together unto condemnation. And the rest will I set in order when I come.

*(The bread and the wine in remembrance of the Lord's suffering, death and resurrection is now distributed in the assembly of believers, the faithfuls. The rite ends with a hymn as found in Matthew 26:30). This is the short version of the Holy Eucharist (Lord's Supper), but the most biblical.)*

Continuing with comments about eating, the apostle reiterated a principle that he had expressed earlier (6:22), "Everything is lawful, but not everything is beneficial. Everything is lawful, but not everything builds up." Just because a certain act is not in itself wrong does not make it right in every situation. It may not prove to be beneficial, advantageous, or helpful in its impact on others. Instead of having a wholesome effect, one that strengthens observers to do what is right and proper, it could embolden them to take an injurious course of action or to condemn as a wrongdoer the one who had made inconsiderate use of his Christian freedom. (10:23)

For this reason, believers needed to think about the effect their actions could have on others. They should not to seek their own advantage or what they might personally prefer or have the right to do. (10:24)

When it came to buying meat at the meat or food market (*mákellon*), believers could purchase whatever they might desire. The *mákellon* may not necessarily have been a place where only meat was sold, and not all of the meat would have been previously offered to an idol. Scrupulous Jews, with a sensitive conscience respecting defilement, doubtless would have asked about the source of the meat before deciding to buy it. The Corinthian believers, however, could eat whatever they may have bought without having made any previous inquiry on account of their conscience, “for” (as Paul continued with a quotation from Psalm 24:1 [23:1, LXX]) “the Lord’s [is] the earth and its fullness.” In the Hebrew text, the divine name (YHWH) is found. Accordingly, in this quotation of the extant Greek text, “Lord” refers to the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. As the Creator, God owns the earth and everything that exists in it. The presentation of food to a lifeless idol that represented a nonexistent deity did not change that reality. (10:25, 26)

Upon coming to be believers, the Corinthians still had family ties and other relationships with unbelievers that remained intact. If an unbeliever invited them for a meal and they wanted to accept the invitation, there was no reason for them not to do so. At the homes of unbelievers, believers could eat whatever might have been served. For conscience’ sake, they did not need to inquire about the source of the meat, recognizing that everything belonged to God and that they partook of the meal as a provision from him. (10:27)

If, though, someone disclosed that the meat had previously been part of a sacrifice to an idol, the believer would have a reason not to eat it. This would not be on account of the believer’s own conscience but that of the one who had made the disclosure. Paul did not indicate whether the one speaking up would be a believer or an unbeliever. In the case of an unbeliever, the believer’s eating could suggest that he was joining approvingly in an idolatrous act. A fellow believer with a weak conscience, on the other hand, could be prompted to eat the meat with the feelings of previous conditioning to idolatrous banqueting and be afterward pained by a guilty conscience. There is also a possibility that the believer with a weak conscience would refrain from eating the meat and come to regard the one eating as having committed sin. (10:28)

Once a question was raised regarding the meat, the believer had to consider the conscience of others. It was not, as Paul continued, a matter of the believer’s own conscience, “but that of the other.” (10:29)

The apostle then raised two questions. “For why should my freedom be judged by another’s conscience? If I am partaking with thanks, why should I be blasphemed for what I am giving thanks?” It appears that Paul’s meaning is that

he would not do something that he had every right to do if it could result in others judging or condemning him on the basis of their conscience. He endeavoured to avoid having others pass judgment on his freedom as a disciple of God's Son. When he thanked God for the provision of food before him, he did not want to be blasphemed or denounced as a sinner who had engaged in an act of idolatry. (10:29, 30)

The use of Christian freedom should always be governed by what will contribute to the glory of God. To the extent possible, believers should earnestly strive to avoid any action that has the potential for bringing reproach on God from those who observe their conduct. Paul admonished the Corinthians, "Whether you are eating, whether you are drinking, whether you are doing anything else, do all things for God's glory." In every aspect of life, the believer's objective should be to safeguard and magnify the reputation of God through praiseworthy conduct. (10:31)

Pointing to his own example, the apostle urged the Corinthians, "Do not become a cause for stumbling to Jews and to Greeks and to the congregation of God [the community of believers which belongs to God, having been purchased with the blood of his own Son], as I am pleasing everyone in everything, not seeking my own [advantage], but that of the many, so that they might be saved." (10:32, 33)

Both fellow believers and unbelievers should be shown consideration, with love and compassion guiding one's conduct in relation to them and their limitations. In matters that do not involve one's loyalty to God and Christ, every effort should be made to treat the conscientious feelings of others with respect and to avoid giving needless offense. Paul set the example in this, not insisting on his rights, but recommending himself to the consciences of all. He was concerned about their eternal future and so put the interests of the many ahead of his own, doing so in the hope that they would respond favourably to the message about the Son of God, be forgiven of their sins, and be saved or delivered from the consequences of sin. (10:32, 33)

### **Notes:**

The quotation in 1 Corinthians 10:7 reads the same as the extant Septuagint text of Exodus 32:6.

In Numbers 25:9, the number who died is given as 24,000. According to 1 Corinthians 10:8, 23,000 fell in one day. One possible explanation is that 23,000 were understood to have perished from the plague, whereas 1,000 of the

prominent instigators (chieftains of the people) were not included because of having been executed earlier. (Numbers 25:4)

Paul's reference (in 10:17) to the "body" as being composed of "many" indicates that the community of believers constitutes Christ's body. A prayer contained in the Didache (thought to date from the late first or early second century) likewise associates the composite body of the community of believers with the loaf of bread from which all partake. "We thank you, our Father, for the life and knowledge which you have made known to us through Jesus your servant. To you [be] the glory for eternity. As this broken bread was dispersed on the mountains and gathered to become one, thus may your congregation be gathered from the ends of the earth into your kingdom." (9:3, 4) The scattering or dispersing "on the mountains" appears to refer to the sowing of seed in hilly or mountainous regions, with the harvested grain from many ears being ground into flour and coming to be just one loaf of bread. In like manner, widely scattered believers come to be just one composite body on the basis of what Christ has done for them through his sacrificial death.

A number of translations render Paul's questions (10:29, 30) as an objection to his admonition to show consideration for the conscience of others. "But why, you ask, should my freedom be judged by someone else's conscience? If I eat the meal with thankfulness, why am I criticized because of something for which I thank God?" (NCV) "Now why should my freedom to eat be at the mercy of someone else's conscience? Or why should an evil be said of me when I have eaten meat with thankfulness, and have thanked God for it?" (J. B. Phillips) "'What?' you say. 'Is my freedom to be called in question by another's conscience? If I partake with thankfulness, why am I blamed for eating food over which I have said grace?'" (REB) The answer to the objection would then be, Because all things should be done to God's glory, which requires showing consideration for the conscience of others and seeking to avoid putting a stumbling block in their way.

The context in which the questions are placed, however, does not introduce them as an objection. So it appears more likely that Paul meant to continue speaking of himself in the first person as an example to the Corinthians of what he chose to prevent from taking place. He wanted to avoid having his use of freedom condemned and his partaking of food with thanks denounced as sinful.

## **1 Corinthians 11:1-34**

### **11: 1-16 The church and its women**

#### **Verses 1-10 The headship of the man**

With apparent reference to his being willing to forgo his own rights for the good of others, Paul encouraged the Corinthians to become imitators of him, as he was of Christ. In coming to the earth and laying down his life for humankind, the Son of God revealed the greatness of his love for humans, doing so at great cost to himself in order for them to be delivered from the condemnation of sin and to be reconciled to his Father, provided they responded in faith to him and what he had done for them. Jesus Christ did not please himself but chose to follow a course that would result in the greatest good possible for humankind. (11:1)

At this point, Paul directed attention to other matters. He first praised or commended the Corinthians for having remembered him in everything and adhered to the “traditions” he had passed on to them. “Everything” or “all” is here to be understood in a general sense. Basically, the Corinthians had kept Paul’s teaching in mind and had followed the customary ways or procedures for conduct within the community of believers as he had made these known to them. (11:2) Nevertheless, problems had arisen, and Paul either learned about these from members of Chloe’s household (1:11) or from Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus (16:17).

The apostle started his corrective admonition with a basic principle regarding headship. He wanted the Corinthians to “know,” recognize, or keep in mind that Christ is the head of every man, that the man is the head of woman, and that God is the head of Christ. If Paul meant to include all men, Christ is their head from the standpoint of his having bought the entire human race with his precious blood. He is the Master, Lord, or Owner, the one whom believing men recognize as their head. In the family, the head is the man, husband, or father. As the Son and the Word through whom the Father made known his will, Christ is subordinate. His Father is the preeminent one or his head. (11:3)

In his own family, the man, husband, or father is not subordinate to or under the authority of another human. As a disciple of God’s Son, a man would be filling his proper role with reference to his spiritual life when praying or prophesying. The prophesying would relate primarily to conveying God’s will to others and not necessarily foretelling future events (which aspect was not the main feature of prophecy). Therefore, in his divinely designated role, a man would “disgrace

his head” when covering it while praying or prophesying. Whereas “head” could refer to the man’s own physical head, it is more likely to designate Christ, the one whom Paul had identified as the “head” of the man. (11:4)

In the Greek text of verse 4, there is no word meaning “covering.” The term preceding “head” is the preposition *katá*, which in this context means “down” and suggests that a covering would be hanging down from the head. Whether the man might cover his head by pulling the upper part of his garment over his head or using a separate piece of cloth is not revealed in the account. If a man were to cover his head, he would be concealing his divinely designated role. By this deliberate act, he would imply that he (either on account of shame or fear) did not want to function in this role and reflect the image of God. As a member of Christ’s body, a believing man would thereby shame Christ as his head. He would be refusing to imitate the Son of God who delights in always reflecting his Father’s image flawlessly.

Paul’s comments about a man are more likely to have been a hypothetical example and not representative of actual cases in the community of believers. This appears to be evident from the fact that the apostle primarily addressed the disregard of established custom by women in the congregation.

“Every woman, however, who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered disgraces her head.” When assuming a role that would be the prerogative of a husband or a father and violating the existing standard of propriety, a woman would be disgracing the man, usurping his place as one who is divinely responsible for manifesting God’s glory or majesty. While it could be said that she would also be bringing shame upon herself or upon her own head, the more likely meaning is that she would be disgracing the man, either the husband or the father. If a woman disrespectfully refused to cover her head as an indication of her rightful place, she might as well have all her hair cut off. (11:5)

“But if,” Paul continued, it would be “disgraceful for a woman to be shorn or shaved,” then she should cover her head. For women in the first century to have appeared publicly as shorn or shaved would have been unthinkable. They would have been ashamed to do so. Even today most women choose to conceal extensive hair loss or baldness. They are uncomfortable about being seen as bald. Many men, on the other hand, choose to shave off all their hair and have no qualms about their bald appearance. In view of the way in which women commonly regarded their hair, it logically followed that they would cover their heads when praying or prophesying, differentiating themselves from the men who, with uncovered heads, prayed or prophesied. (11:6)



As to why a man should not cover his head and a woman should do so, Paul continued, “The man is God’s image and glory, but the woman [is] man’s glory.” In the family, a husband or father is not subordinate to a human head. He is the head of his household. Accordingly, in this role, he can reflect the image and majesty of God, for the heavenly Father is supreme and in no way subject to anyone else. In the case of a woman, the situation is different. As a member of the household, she has a husband or a father as her head. In her role, the woman is a glory to the man when she conducts herself in the laudable and dignified manner that brings honour to him in the eyes of others. (11:7)

Alluding to the Genesis account (2:18-22) that speaks of God as having purposed for the woman to be man’s helper and having “built” her from man’s rib, the apostle said, “Man is not out of woman, but woman [is] out of man, for also man was not created for woman but woman for man.” (11:8, 9)

Although believing men and women have an equal standing as “sons of God” by reason of their faith in Christ and what he accomplished through his death, this does not invalidate the headship arrangement in the family. Therefore, in the state of their earthly existence, women conduct themselves in a manner that reflects their role as being in a supportive position and not in a preeminent one. “Therefore, the woman should have authority on her head on account of the angels.” (11:10)

If Paul had meant that a woman’s head covering signified that she was under authority, he could have expressed this by specifically saying that she should cover her head to indicate her subjection. Because he did not do so, a possible significance may be that a woman, by covering her head, would show her recognition of her divinely ordained role, and this would authorize her to pray or prophesy in the presence of fellow believers. Instead of representing her as being under authority, the head covering would seemingly serve to show that she was maintaining her proper place as a woman with the authority to pray or prophesy. (11:10)

The Greek word *ángelos* (“angel”) can designate either a human or a heavenly messenger. So, “on account of the angels” could refer to visiting messengers or representatives from other congregations. By covering their heads, believing Corinthian women would be showing regard for these messengers by acting in harmony with accepted custom when praying or prophesying. They would not be conducting themselves in an offensive manner. If the reference is to heavenly messengers or angels, the main thought could be that women would be showing proper regard for the position of angels. These spirit persons exist on a plane that is higher than that of humans and were created in God’s image. Praying and

prophesying would be done in their presence. It would grieve the angels to observe women disregarding their proper role in matters of worship and bringing disgrace to husbands and fathers. (11:10) It appears that some of the women in Corinth had cast off all restraint, perhaps considering their spiritual equality with men as nullifying the God-ordained roles for men and women.

Possibly to avoid giving men the idea that they, in relation to women, were superior in God's eyes, Paul reminded the community of believers that, "in the Lord," the woman did not exist "without the man, and the man without the woman." At one with the Lord Jesus Christ as members of his body, both men and women needed one another for mutual strengthening and encouraging as fellow children of God. (11:11)

Just as believing men and women depend on one another "in the Lord," the physical existence of men and women is not independent of one another. "The woman [is] out of the man," for the first woman was "built" from the man's rib. At the same time, all men owe their existence to women through the birthing process. Accordingly, "man is through woman." Ultimately, though, "everything is from God." He is the source of all that exists. (11:12)

Inviting the Corinthians to give consideration to what he has been discussing, Paul continued, "Judge for yourselves, Is it fitting for a woman to pray uncovered to God?" The implied answer, based on what he had already stated, would be, No. (11:13)

Paul, though, added yet another reason, "Does not nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair it is a dishonour to him, but if a woman has long hair it is a glory to her?" "Nature" or the natural sense of propriety "teaches" or makes clear that men wear or have their hair cut in a manner that markedly differs from women. The long hair style typical for women in the first-century Greco-Roman world would have been regarded as disgraceful for a man. The long hair that proved to be a "glory" for a woman—a crowning ornament of beauty—would have been dishonourable for a man. (11:14, 15)

When referring to a woman's long hair as having been given her instead of a "wraparound," Paul seems to have meant that a woman's long hair was God's gift to her, functioning like a beautiful garment. Custom dictated that this splendid natural covering not to be treated in a manner that would reflect unfavourably on its being a glory to the woman. If she acted contrary to her divinely appointed role, refusing to cover her head when praying or prophesying in the presence of fellow believers, she would detract from the glory or splendour of her long hair. (11:15)

## **Verses 11-16; Order under grace**

Paul acknowledged that there may have been those who had a different view and would not be persuaded by what he had written. He, though, was unwilling to argue the point, saying “we have no such custom [other than what he had set forth], nor do the congregations of God.” In all the other communities of believers, women who prayed or prophesied did so with covered heads. Therefore, believers in Corinth had no basis for introducing an innovation that Paul could not support and for which not a single precedent existed in any other congregation. (11:16)

## **11:17-34. Disorders at the Lord’s Supper rebuked**

### **Verses 17-22. The disorder exposed.**

The apostle next addressed a more serious problem that had arisen regarding table fellowship and the Lord’s Supper. On account of the abuses that had come into existence, Paul could not praise or commend the Corinthians. The situation had deteriorated to the point where their meeting together did more harm than good, for they assembled not for “the better but for the worse.” (11:17)

According to reports that had reached the apostle, divisions existed among the Corinthians when they met as a congregation. Seemingly aware that what one might hear is not as authoritative as firsthand knowledge, he added that, “to an extent,” he believed what he had heard. (11:18)

Based on what he did know, Paul concluded that a divisive party spirit had come into existence and so could say to them, “For there must also be factions among you.” The existence of such factions would reveal who among them were approved or who in their midst did not identify themselves with a particular faction but demonstrated themselves to be exclusively attached to Jesus Christ as Lord. (11:19)

Whenever the Corinthians partook of the Lord’s “supper” (*deípnōn*), their unity as members of Christ’s body and beloved fellow children of God should have been in evidence. This, though, was not the case when they assembled. The existing factions and abuses revealed that they were not eating the Lord’s supper. Their actions were contrary to the purpose for which the Lord Jesus Christ had instituted its observance. (11:20)

The Greek term *deípnōn* designates the main meal of the day and was commonly eaten in the evening. As part of this meal, believers partook of the unleavened bread and wine in remembrance of Jesus’ death and what it

accomplished for them. So it appears that the entire meal was regarded as the Lord's supper.

In connection with this meal, a loveless spirit had developed among the Corinthians. They did not share food with everyone and, in fact, did not wait for all to arrive before beginning to eat. Slaves who had little control over when they might be free to leave to go to someone else's home would have been among the latecomers. They and other poor members of the congregation would have benefited most from being able to enjoy a meal with fellow believers. Yet, without any regard for those in need or those who were no part of their particular faction, the ones with an abundance of food and drink began to eat their own supper. Possibly to indicate that those who ate their own meals had ample for sharing, Paul referred to one person as being "drunk" while another continued to be hungry. (11:21)

If the ones who ate their own meals were so hungry that they just could not wait for others, they, as Paul reminded them by means of a question, had their own homes in which they could eat and drink. He continued, "Or do you despise the congregation of God and humiliate those who have nothing?" All believers were part of the congregation or community that belonged to God and that had been purchased with the precious blood of his own Son. To treat any fellow believer in a loveless manner would have constituted a contemptuous attitude toward those whom the heavenly Father and his Son deeply loved. For believers to humiliate poor fellow children of God by letting them remain hungry proved to be a horrific violation of Jesus' command to love as he had loved. Paul must have been deeply troubled by the disturbing reports, prompting him to say, "Shall I praise you? In this, I do not praise [you]." (11:22)

#### **Verses 23-34. The disorder corrected.**

The apostle was not responsible for the problems that had developed among the Corinthians. When he was with them, he had imparted to them what he had received from the Lord. On the night Jesus was handed over, "he took a [loaf of] bread, and [upon] giving thanks, broke [it], and said, 'This is my body for you. Do this for a remembrance of me.' Likewise [he took] also the cup after the meal, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, whenever you drink, for a remembrance of me.'"

 (11:23-25)

Paul had not been personally present for this occasion. His reference to receiving the specifics from the Lord suggests that he must have had a direct revelation from Jesus Christ in order to speak authoritatively about the event.

The handing over may refer to the betrayal of Judas, which led to Jesus' arrest, trial, and subsequent execution. (11:23)

During the night Jesus was with the apostles in an upper room in Jerusalem and eating the Passover meal, he used unleavened bread and a cup of wine to institute an observance that all of his disciples were to continue. To distribute the unleavened bread, Jesus broke it after he had said a blessing. (11:24)

The Greek word for "bread" (*ártos*) is masculine, but the word for "this" (*toúto*; "this is my body") is neuter, raising a question about whether the bread is actually being linked to Christ's body of flesh. (11:24) One explanation for the neuter is that "this" reflects the neuter gender of the word for "body" (*sóma*). From a strict grammatical standpoint, however, the word for "this" should be masculine to establish a direct relationship of the bread to the fleshly body of God's Son.

Earlier (in 10:17), Paul spoke of the body as being the community of believers. The corporate "body" of which Christ is the head may also be the main focus of the words, "This is my body." By surrendering his life, Jesus made it possible for the corporate body of many members to come into existence, and the individual members benefit from this body and its head. In that sense, the "body" could be understood to be "for" the believers. (11:24)

The primary aim of Paul's letter was to provide corrective admonition rather than an exposition on the precise meaning of Jesus' words. The apostle's response to developments among the Corinthians was directed to them as a community of believers or as members of the body of Christ. This provides a basis for concluding that Paul's references to the "body" mainly relate to the corporate body of believers and not to the fleshly body of Christ.

Other ancient manuscript readings, however, do not support understanding the "body" to be the community of believers. These manuscripts contain an expanded text, "This is my body being broken for you." It could not be said that the body of believers was broken for the individual members, but the physical body of Christ was "broken" when he died sacrificially. This did result in benefits for his disciples. It made possible their being forgiven of sins and coming into an approved standing with God as his children on the basis of their faith in Christ and what he had accomplished.

The apostles who actually heard Jesus' words would not have understood that, in some way, a transformation had taken place in the bread itself, for he was in their midst as a human. If, then, the focus is on Jesus' own body, the neuter

“this” (*toúto*) could signify that what Jesus did in breaking the bread and giving it to the apostles indicated that he would offer his own body for them. Based on what actually resulted when Jesus died sacrificially, one could say that the bread serves to bring to remembrance that he offered his body of flesh and that this brought a body of believers into existence. Jesus’ own body, which he surrendered for the world of mankind, and the corporate body of which he is the head have proved to be for the benefit of believers individually. (Compare Ephesians 4:11-13.) When partaking of the bread, believers do so in remembrance of Jesus, appreciatively acknowledging what he has done for them.

“After the eating [of the meal; *deipnéo*],” Jesus took the cup, said a blessing, and then passed the cup to the apostles. (Matthew 26:27; Mark 14:23) The word *deipnéo* is the verb form of the noun *deípnōn*, which designates the main meal of the day. The common view is that after the apostles had finished the Passover meal and eaten the broken pieces of the unleavened bread, Jesus immediately introduced the cup of wine. This, though, is not necessarily the case. The Son of God may have started the actual meal by breaking the bread and handing it to his disciples. This would have followed the pattern of what is known about ancient Jewish custom. The head of the household or the host, before the start of the meal, said a prayer, broke the bread, and then distributed it. Whether this is what Jesus did cannot be determined from the preserved accounts. What is clear, however, is that the partaking of the bread and the wine was linked to a meal, and this continued to be the case when first-century believers met in homes for spiritual fellowship. (11:25)

The cup of wine represented what Jesus would accomplish in putting the new covenant in force on the basis of his shed blood. This “new covenant” is referred to as being “in the blood,” for without the pouring out of Jesus’ blood there would have been no new covenant. His blood proved to be the element that put the new covenant in force and, therefore, in which its benefits resided. The words about the cup confirm that no transformation is to be understood as having taken place in the case of the unleavened bread. The actual cup of wine could not be spoken of as being the new covenant, the validation of which occurred on the basis of Christ’s precious blood. Since the verb “is,” which expresses the relationship of the cup to the new covenant, does not mean actual identification with this covenant, the “is” would likewise not require a transformation of the bread in a manner that would equate it with Christ’s actual physical body. When drinking from the cup of wine, believers would be doing so in remembrance of Jesus. They would be reminded of the fact that, based on what he did for them when shedding his precious blood, they had become fellow sharers in the new covenant, which included being forgiven of sins and

participating in all other privileges and blessings this covenant made possible. (11:25)

While some have concluded that Jesus instituted an annual observance because of its association with the annual Passover, Paul's words to the Corinthians do not support this. The opening word of verse 26 is *hosákis*, a term common in ancient Greek writings and meaning "whenever," "as many times as," and "as often as." The same word is found in Revelation 11:6, where the reference is to "whenever" the two witnesses chose to use the authority that had been granted to them. (See the Notes section.) Accordingly, whenever the Corinthians assembled and partook of the bread and the wine, they proclaimed the death of their Lord for them. It was a tangible reminder of his death and everything that he accomplished thereby. Paul's words indicate that believers would continue to make this tangible proclamation of the Lord's death until he would arrive in glory. His approved followers would then be united to him in changed glorified bodies as had those who immediately preceded them upon rising from the dead. (11:26; compare 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17.)

Those eating of the unleavened loaf and drinking of the cup of the Lord unworthily would make themselves guilty respecting the body and blood of the Lord. The Corinthian believers who failed to show love for their disadvantaged brothers, not waiting for them to share in the meal, did eat unworthily. When excluding fellow believers from participating with them in the table fellowship, they sinned against members of the body of Christ. The Corinthians who acted in a loveless manner made themselves guilty respecting Christ's blood, for they acted contrary to the purpose for which he died. With his precious blood, all believers had been purchased and cleansed from sin, leading to their having an approved standing as God's beloved children. For anyone to humiliate fellow believers, treating them as undeserving of love and compassion, constituted a denial of the efficacy of Christ's blood. Such hateful action made it appear that his blood had not rendered all believers as acceptable members of God's beloved family. What is done to the members of Christ's body is done to him as the head. So those guilty of hateful action would have placed themselves in the same position as those who were responsible for Jesus' death. (11:27)

In view of the seriousness of what had taken place among the Corinthians, they needed to "test," "prove" or "examine" themselves, determining whether they were in the right condition to partake of the unleavened bread and the wine. The implication is that, if they recognized the error of their ways, they needed to repent and change, asking fellow believers against whom they had sinned for forgiveness. After the self-testing and making sure that they could partake of the

Lord's supper in a worthy manner would it be right for them to "eat of the bread and drink from the cup." (11:28)

Those who ate and drank without discerning "the body" ("the body of the Lord," according to other manuscripts) would be eating and drinking judgment against themselves. They would merit condemnation. The words "without discerning the body" could be understood in three basic ways: (1) not differentiating between common food and the bread and the wine used in the observance, (2) not eating with a proper appreciation for what the Lord Jesus Christ did when laying down his life sacrificially, and (3) failing to recognize all believers as part of the body and not treating them as beloved members of that body. The apostle's focus on the corporate body of believers and the abuses he mentioned suggest that the third meaning is the preferable one. Among the Corinthians, a significant number had failed to discern that all associated were members of Christ's body and that they were obligated to treat them with the kind of love that Jesus had shown when laying down his life in sacrifice. (11:29)

The loveless spirit certain ones among the Corinthians had shown was spiritually destructive. It also seems to have affected the physical well-being of the congregation, for Paul specifically linked the failure to discern the body with what had happened in their midst. "Therefore, many of you are weak and sick, and a considerable number have fallen asleep." This suggests that quite a few of the Corinthian believers were physically ill and a disproportionate number had fallen asleep in death. Lack of love is death dealing. (11:30)

For the Corinthians to avoid adverse judgment, they needed to examine themselves and take any required corrective action. As Paul continued, "But if we examine ourselves, we will not be judged." (11:31)

It appears that Paul regarded the weakness, illness, and death as expressions of the Lord's judgment. Being the congregation's head, the Lord Jesus Christ does judge its members, and his judgment serves as corrective discipline. (Compare Revelation 2:20-23.) The objective of the Lord's judgment is so that the members of his body will not experience the severe judgment to come upon the world that is at enmity with his Father. (11:32)

Although there were those in Corinth who had transgressed, Paul did not reject them but addressed them as "my brothers," acknowledging them as part of his beloved family of God's children. He urged them to end the past abuses, waiting for one another before they began to eat. (11:33)



If any in their midst were so hungry that they could not wait until all arrived, they should eat at home. Then, when they came together as a congregation to eat a meal and to partake of the unleavened bread and the wine, they would not be doing so in a manner that would merit the Lord's unfavourable judgment. Their united fellowship at one table would reflect love and consideration for all and a deep appreciation for what Lord Jesus Christ had done for them. (11:34)

There were other matters that needed to be given attention, but Paul did not consider it essential to address them in this letter. He planned to deal with them personally during his next visit in Corinth. (11:34)

### Notes:

The concluding part of 1 Corinthians 11:22 can be punctuated differently. "Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise [you]."

The early controversies involving Nisan 14 were not about whether there should be an annual observance of the Lord's supper but when the fasting prior to the period linked to Jesus' death should end. According to the Eusebius (c. 263 to c. 339 CE), Victor, the head of the church in Rome, made an issue of trying to enforce Sunday as the official day for ending the fast. This was in the second century. The "bishops" in Asia, with Polycrates taking the leading position, resisted. Eusebius wrote about the two positions (*Ecclesiastical History*, V, 23 [translated by G. A. Williamson]): "All the Asian dioceses thought that in accordance with ancient tradition they ought to observe the fourteenth day of the lunar month as the beginning of the Paschal festival — the day on which the Jews had been commanded to sacrifice the lamb: on that day, no matter which day of the week it might be, they must without fail bring the fast to an end. But nowhere else in the world was it customary to arrange their celebrations in that way: in accordance with apostolic tradition, they preserved the view which still prevails, that it was improper to end the fast on any day other than that of our Saviour's resurrection."

Humans tend to be traditionalists. This also weighs against the view that an established annual celebration, an anniversary, would in the course of time change to an observance that is repeated throughout the year. Traditionally, anniversaries remain fixed as anniversaries. Moreover, the fact that Paul did not consider it necessary to address other problems until he actually visited Corinth but did feel compelled to deal with the abuses that had arisen regarding the Lord's supper points to a comparatively frequent practice. The abuses that arose within a comparatively short time after Paul left Corinth provide additional evidence about the unlikelihood of this being an annual event.

Some have thought that the words in 1 Corinthians 11:30 refer to spiritual weakness, illness, and sleep or death. This seems less likely, for spiritual states cannot be differentiated with the kind of specific terms that relate to physical conditions.

## **I Corinthians 12: 1-31**

### **12:1-11. The believer and the sign of gifts**

#### **Verses 1-3. The Giver of the gifts**

Paul did not wish the Corinthian believers to be in ignorance about the “spiritual [gifts].” Based on his development of the subject, he wanted them to recognize the source of these gifts and the purpose for which they had been granted. (12:1; see the Notes section.)

Corinthian believers who had been Gentiles alienated from God knew how they had conducted themselves as idolaters. They had been led as by a compelling force to speechless idols, representations of nonexistent deities. As idolaters, they had been led away like irrational animals, for their impulses and emotions, not their mental faculties, gave rise to their ecstatic or frenzied outbursts. (12:2)

In view of their past experience as idolaters, Paul wanted them to know that God’s spirit would never give rise to empty or blasphemous expressions. Under the impelling power of God’s spirit, no one would have been able to say, “Jesus [is] accursed [*anáthema*]!” God’s spirit would prompt the acknowledgment, “Jesus [is] Lord.” Without the operation of the Holy Spirit, a person would not be able to make this acknowledgment as an expression of genuine faith. (12:3)

#### **Verses 4-11. The enumeration of the gifts.**

Although a variety of spiritual gifts existed, all had the same source—God’s spirit. The spiritual gifts had been granted to function in a unified manner, with no gift working at cross-purposes with the other gifts. (12:4)

Continuing to emphasize this unity, Paul, after calling attention to the existence of a variety of services or ministries, added that there is the same Lord. The varied ministries related to looking after the material needs of fellow believers. Help had to be provided to poor widows and others who may have been impoverished on account of persecution, natural disasters, or other adversities. Those rendering varied services needed to be able to evaluate needs and to have the essential skills to render appropriate aid in an impartial manner. Through the

operation of the Holy Spirit, the Lord Jesus Christ enhanced the abilities of those who ministered and guided their efforts. (12:5)

There were various works, but there was only one God who was working in all who were performing a variety of tasks for the benefit of fellow believers. With the heavenly Father being the one who, by means of his spirit, furthered the accomplishment of the works in everyone, this would rule out any divisiveness or competitiveness. All works would contribute to benefit the congregation as a whole. These works could have included all operations of a miraculous nature, which operations God effects by means of his spirit and in all believers who have been granted the spiritual endowments. (12:6)

To each one, the manifestation of the spirit in the form of spiritual gifts had been given for a beneficial purpose. This indicates that believers were to use their divinely granted gifts in a manner that would contribute to the well-being of the congregation. The possession of one or more of these gifts was not to be a basis for pride. (12:7)

One believer might have the “word of wisdom” as a spiritual gift. This may have related to the ability to provide wise guidance and admonition to fellow believers. (12:8) In 2 Peter 3:15, this wisdom is attributed to Paul. “Our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you.”

Another believer might have “word of knowledge,” a miraculous knowledge that would not have been acquired through a process of learning and instruction. (12:8) When, for example, Ananias and Sapphira lied about the amount from the purchase price of a field they had donated for believers in need, Peter, by reason of his possession of miraculously granted knowledge, exposed their deception. (Acts 5:1-9)

Although “word of wisdom” and “word of knowledge” designated two distinct gifts, they were both the product of the same spirit, God’s spirit. (12:8) Likewise, one believer might have the spiritual gift of faith, whereas another believer might be endowed with the ability to heal illness and affliction. Though very different spiritual gifts, they were still a product of the one spirit of God. In this case, faith would not be the faith all believers in Christ and his Father possessed. It would be a miraculous faith or conviction that enabled the possessor to know when to take a particular course of action that would have seemed impossible but which would lead to good results. (12:9) Paul apparently referred to this faith as the kind which can move mountains or what appeared to be insurmountable obstacles. (13:2)

For a believer to have been endowed with works of power may have included the spiritual gift of being able to free others from demon possession, to raise the dead, and to restore sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf. The gift of prophecy with which another believer may have been endowed included being able to foretell future events and to console, edify, encourage, and strengthen fellow believers by making known God's will. (12:10)

A believer with the gift to discern "spirits" would have been able to determine whether prophetic utterances originated from God or had a human or demonic source. Based on the account in Acts 2:7-11, believers who had been granted the gift of tongues were able to express themselves like native speakers in languages other than those they had learned. Those with the gift of "interpretation of tongues" would have been able to translate languages they did not personally speak. (12:10)

"The one and the same spirit" operated to empower believers to exercise this great variety of gifts. Paul attributed the possession of the gifts individual believers might have to the wishing or choosing (*boúlomai*) of the "spirit" (*pneúma*). This indicated that the gifts had been divinely granted to the possessor and did not involve the individual's personal choice. (12:11; compare Acts 8:18-20.) A similar use of the Greek word *pneúma*, with the contextual meaning of "wind," is found in John 3:8, "The wind (*pneúma*) blows where it wishes [or chooses (*thélo*)], and you hear its sound, but you do not know from where it is coming and where it is going." Although the Greek verbs *boúlomai* and *thélo* are different, they both can denote wishing or choosing but not always a choice that involves intelligent thought. (See, for example, the Septuagint rendering of Job 39:9, where *boúlomai* is used regarding an animal.)

## **12: 12-31. The church and the sign of gifts**

### **Verses 12-27. The church as the body of Christ.**

The physical organism, though consisting of many parts, is just one body. "So also is the Christ," meaning that the many believers who are members of Christ's body form one corporate whole. (12:12)

Including himself with all other believers, Paul stressed unity, saying, "For also in one spirit all of us were baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks [representative of all non-Jews], whether slaves or free [persons], and all of us were made to drink of one spirit." Believers experienced this baptism when they received God's spirit. Upon then coming to be united to Christ as their head and members of his corporate body, they were baptized "in" or by means of one

spirit “into one body.” Neither ethnic nor social differences mattered, for God’s spirit had been imparted without distinction to all believers. This constituted them partakers of the spirit, and so they could appropriately be referred to as being made to “drink of one spirit.” (12:13)

The body itself is not one member but is made up of many parts. (12:14) This applies to both the physical body and the corporate body of Christ.

All of the members are essential for the proper functioning of the body. The foot could not say that, on account of its not being a hand, it is no part of the body. Similarly, the ear could not say that, because of its not being an eye, it is no part of the body. (12:15, 16)

The body parts depend on one another. “If the whole body [were] an eye, where [would] the [faculty of] hearing [be]? If the whole [body were the faculty of] hearing, where [would the faculty of] smelling [be]?” For the body to have the full complement of senses, the respective organs are needed. It would be seriously detrimental to the body if its function were limited solely to one organ. (12:17)

God, in keeping with his will, has placed the members in the body, with each part having an assigned function that benefits the corporate whole. (12:18) Continuing to stress the interdependence of the many body members, Paul raised a rhetorical question, “But if all [the parts] were one member, where [would] the body [be]?” One organ is not enough for a functioning body to exist. (12:19)

“Now, however, [there are] indeed [not in all manuscripts] many members, but [only] one body.” By virtue of its many parts, the body exists as a viable organism. (12:20)

Paul went on to illustrate that the parts of the body are not independent of one another. The eye is in no position to tell the hand, “I do not need you.” Even the vital head cannot say to the feet, “I do not need you.” (12:21)

In fact, as the apostle continued, the seemingly “weaker” body parts are essential, performing important functions. These weaker body members would be parts other than those like the feet, legs, hands and arms that are associated with activity and exertion. The eyes, the brain, the heart, the lungs, and various other internal organs cannot be subjected to the kind of external hazards that the feet and hands encounter on a regular basis. Whereas the amputation of a hand or a foot would not usually mean the end of life for the body, the loss of the kidneys, the lungs, the heart, the brain or various other internal organs would be fatal. (12:22)

Body parts or organs that are considered “dishonourable” or not fit for continual exposure are the very ones to which greater attention is given. Certain parts of the body customarily are covered by clothing. “We,” as Paul noted, thus surround these parts with “greater honour.” The body members that are regarded as unbecoming for exposure are the very parts that are treated with greater respect, for garments serve to conceal them from public view. The comely or attractive body parts (like the face), however, have no such need for clothing. (12:23)

God’s arrangement of the human body is such that greater honour is given to the parts or organs that appear to be lacking in attractiveness or hardness. The internal organs are hidden from view and protected. From the standpoint of their indispensable role in the continuance of life, the major internal organs have been assigned greater honour. Without the functions they perform, the body could not continue to live. (12:24)

On account of the way in which God has arranged the human body, there is no division in the organism, but all the parts are interconnected. Paul referred to these body parts as having the “same concern for one another. And when one member suffers, all the other members suffer with it. When one member is glorified, all the other members rejoice with it.” A pain in one part of the body affects the whole organism. The noteworthy accomplishment of one member brings joy to the whole body. Acknowledgment of good work done with the hands, for example, may be regarded as “glorifying” or praising them. For the individual, the expressions of commendation contribute to joy and satisfaction. In this manner, the whole body rejoices with the glorified member. (12:25, 26)

Making an application to the Corinthian believers, Paul continued, “But you are Christ’s body and members from a part.” There is no definite article preceding the Greek expression “body of Christ.” This may be significant, for the Corinthians did not make up the whole body of Christ but, as a community of believers, were part of that body. While numerous translations have rendered the literal Greek (“members out of part”) as meaning that the Corinthian believers were individually members of the body of Christ, it may be preferable to understand the words to reflect the actual situation. Individually they were part of a part of a far greater whole that formed the complete body of Christ. (12:27)

### **Verses 28-31; The church and the sign gifts.**

It is in the entire community of believers or in the body of Christ that God has set, placed, or appointed the members with their respective functions for the benefit of all. “First [are] apostles; second, prophets; third, teachers; then [works

of] power; then gifts of healing; [means of] helping; leadership [abilities], [various] kinds of tongues.” (12:28)

In the case of the twelve apostles, they were in position to provide firsthand testimony concerning the example and teaching of Jesus Christ. As the divinely appointed apostle to the non-Jewish nations, Paul had received special revelations from the Son of God. Prophets, though at times foretelling future events, primarily made known God’s will, admonishing and encouraging fellow believers. Teachers provided instruction and imparted the knowledge believers needed to live in harmony with their identity as God’s beloved children. Works of power included the expelling of demons, raising the dead, and restoring sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf. Gifts of healing related to bringing relief to the sick and afflicted. Means of helping (literally, “helps”) probably included all arrangements for providing aid to those in need. The expression “leadership abilities” is a rendering of the plural form of *kybérnēsis*, which term refers to leading, administering, directing, or managing. One function could have been the ability to arrange for and direct relief efforts. Last came the miraculously imparted ability to speak in languages that one had not learned. (12:28)

According to the divine arrangement, the greatest gifts are those that lead to the upbuilding and strengthening of the community of believers as a whole. These gifts also require the use of the conscious mental faculties in cooperating with the leading of God’s spirit and require the greatest personal effort. (12:28; see the Notes section.)

By means of rhetorical questions, Paul reminded the Corinthian believers that not all were apostles, not all were prophets, not all were teachers, not all performed deeds of power, not all did healing, not all spoke in tongues, and not all translated tongues (languages they had not previously learned). He admonished them to strive for the greater gifts. Nevertheless, he wanted to show them the surpassing, superior, or more excellent way, and that way was the way of love, a selfless compassionate care and concern for the welfare of others. (12:29-31)

Among the Corinthians, the speaking in tongues had been overemphasized. So it appears that the greater gifts, such as prophesying and teaching, were not allowed to be expressed fully. These latent greater gifts or endowments should have been zealously sought. They were not to be permitted to atrophy but to be used to the full for the benefit of the congregation. (12:31)

## Notes:

In 1 Corinthians 12:1, the term for “spiritual things” (the plural form of *pneumatikós*) can also designate “spiritual persons.” There is a possibility that the reference is to persons who possessed the spiritual gifts instead of the spiritual gifts themselves. In that case, Paul wanted the possessors of the gifts to recognize their source and their rightful use for the benefit of the community of believers.

The listing of the gifts (12:28) places the speaking in tongues last. Among the Corinthians, the use of this gift resulted in disruptive emotional outbursts, with various ones speaking at the same time. (14:5, 23, 27) The problem this brought about in the Corinthian congregation illustrates what can happen when the value of certain gifts, including those that require real effort, are minimized or denigrated. Care needs to be exercised to treat all fellow believers as valued members of Christ’s body. While some may not be as prominent as hands and feet in visibility and activity, they may, by their loving compassion and concern, perform vital functions comparable to the internal organs of the human body, benefiting the community in many unobservable ways.

## Judgments mentioned in Sacred Scripture

I have heard many friends from both my faith and opposing faiths speaking about judgment as described in the Bible. Some speak of it freely with assurance of salvation to those who want to escape from it. Others do not even want to have anything to do with judgment for it is just a state of mind. Others claim that judgment is just a Christian gimmick to instil fear in people so that they should accept the faith. Some Christians say that judgment is now and we are living in it, while others say that it will come after the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Every one of them speaks with assurance and with references from the Bible. There is only one thing missing in most of these Christians; they do not know which judgment is being discussed in which circumstance. Six people may speak of judgment at the same time but totally different judgment all together. A careful inductive study of the Bible shows that there are seven well-defined judgments appearing in the scriptures. This is in contrast with the concept of single general judgment that refuses to sustain at all. Let us have a look at these judgments in brief:

- 1. GOD’S JUDGMENT OF SIN:** When Jesus was lifted up on the cross, the world and sin was judged and Satan was defeated. This act was



prophesied by David in Psalms 22:1-24. Its fulfilment in the New Testament is mentioned in 1Corinthians 15:3, Hebrews 9:26-28, 1Peter 2:24; 3:18 and in John 12:31. Christ bore our sins so that we should live unto righteousness. This judgment is passed.

2. **BELIEVERS SELF JUDGMENT:** In confessing and forsaking sins committed a believer judges sin and is thus, avoiding the chastisement from the heavenly Father. Unconfessed sin invites chastisement from God (Hebrews 12:7, 1Cor.5:5; 11:31-32). As believers, we are called to judge ourselves so that we cannot be judged. We are to examine ourselves as to whether our faith is properly placed in Christ. The Father's chastisement is that which drives us to repentance. This judgment is not over until our total transformation of the body. It is being carried by believers day by day.
3. **CHRIST'S JUDGMENT OF BELIEVERS:** According to Romans 14:10 and 2 Corinthians 5:10, every believer will appear before the judgment seat of Christ and be judged of his or her works done on earth as a believer, whether it be good or bad. This will not be the judgment of sin, but rather of our motivation and faithfulness or stewardship (1 Cor.3:11-15). Gain or loss of rewards will be the result. This judgment will take place soon after the second appearance of Christ (1 Cor.4:1-5, 2Tim. 4:8) Non-believers have no part in this judgment.
4. **JUDGMENT OF ALL THE UNSAVED:** This is often called '*The Great White Throne Judgment*' (Rev.20:11), which is the final judgment of the unredeemed and will take place at the end of the Kingdom Age. Every unsaved person will face the great White Throne, and no one will be exempted. (Rev.20: 12-15). Everyone whose name is not found written in the book of life will be judged. This will be during the Resurrection of Damnation or second resurrection of the dead (1Cor.15.) for the unsaved will not resurrect during the first resurrection unto rapture (1 Thes.4:13-18). This judgment is not ordinary, as already explained, but is based on absolute justice (v13). Whoever, beginning with Adam and Eve, whose name will not be found written in the book of life (record of the redeemed) will be cast into Hell, the Lake of Fire (eternal separation from God). They will not die, but live forever in torment.
5. **JUDGMENT OF ALL NATIONS:** It takes place at the return of Christ in glory to establish His kingdom over Israel (Matthew 25:31-33). The basis for this judgment is the treatment of Jewish race by other nations. All the nations that curse, oppress and ridicule Israel, or all the enemy nations of Israel will be defeated and judged during the battle of Armageddon. This can be better understood by studying the Bible from

Revelation 4 through the end of the scripture. From here, we see that Israel resumes the centre stage position and continues as such.

- 6. JUDGMENT OF ISRAEL:** This involves the re-gathering of Israel at the end of Millennium period (**Ezekiel 20:33-38**). The bringing together or re-gathering of Israel prophecy will only be fulfilled at the Second Coming and the beginning of the Kingdom Age. Before this time Anti-Christ will invade Israel after short friendship that he will make with her, and the Israel will later realize that she had been fooled. Then God will begin to deal Israel by purging her during the last three and half years of Great Tribulation. At issue here is the opportunity to enter the millennial kingdom (Mal.3:2-5; 4:1-3).
- 7. JUDGMENT OF FALLEN ANGELS:** This is a condemnation of the Devil, (Satan, that old Serpent) and all His Angels (Rev.20:10). This includes those who cohabited with humans prior to the flood (Gen.6:1-4, 2Pet.2:4, Jude 1:6). These are the particular angels who did not maintain their original position in which they were created. They came on earth seeking to cohabit with daughters of men, which they did.

## **CONCLUSION**

In executing such judgments, God is doing a virtue of his justice by processing an absolute perfection out of His infinite holiness. The Gospel of peace and the death of Christ on the cross is the only solution for God's justice and forgiving the guilty of the world, yet without overlooking sin in any way. According to Romans 3:25-26, Jesus was set forth to be propitiation through faith in Him. His death on Calvary declared His righteousness for the remission of our sins. It is destined for a man to die once and then face judgment. The final judgment is not yet until the second coming of the Son of God.

## **1 Corinthians 13: 1-13**

### **13. The church and the permanent gifts**

#### **Verses 1-8a Love must control the exercise of all spiritual gifts**

Using himself as an illustration, Paul said, "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become [like] a resounding gong and a clashing cymbal." His speaking in a human language that had been miraculously imparted to him or, even more impressively, in the language angels use when

communicating with one another could indeed astonish others. The use of this gift, when devoid of love and so without any benefit to fellow believers, would amount to nothing more than a loud noise. (13:1)

Focusing on other divinely granted gifts, the apostle continued, “And if I have prophecy and know all the mysteries and all the knowledge, and if I have all the faith so as to transfer mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.” (13:2)

The use of the prophetic gift often served to edify, console, strengthen and encourage others. This purpose could be attained only when the prophet had love and concern for those to whom his words were directed. (13:2)

Knowledge of “all the mysteries” would include a full understanding of the formerly concealed things of God that had been revealed. (Compare Ephesians 3:1-6.) “All the knowledge” would relate to a complete understanding of God’s will. With a thorough understanding of the “mysteries” and the divine purpose, the individual would be able to teach others. (13:2)

The faith that could transfer mountains from one place to another would be an unshakable conviction that a seemingly impossible course could be undertaken, with good results to follow. One in possession of this kind of miraculous faith would be able to help a community of believers or individuals within that community to act appropriately when faced with what seemed to be insurmountable obstacles. (13:2)

By means of these gifts, those to whom they had been granted could be a blessing to others. While they were impressive endowments by reason of their miraculous nature, these gifts had not been granted to exalt the recipients. They had been given to benefit fellow believers. Therefore, without love being the motivating and guiding force in the use of these gifts, Paul could rightly say that he would be “nothing.” His use of the divinely imparted gifts would have been an empty display, designed to draw attention to himself. (13:2)

If he were to give away all his possessions to help persons in need, and were to surrender his very body so that he might “boast” (form of *kauchaómai*), but did not have love, he would not gain anything. Without real love for fellow humans, great sacrifices undertaken merely for the purpose of being observed and lauded by others have no value in God’s eyes. Regardless of how noble a certain action may appear to be, the absence of love reveals it to be hollow and self-serving. The individual derives no lasting benefit from mere outward acts of generosity and self-sacrifice. (13:3; see the Notes section.)

Love is a selfless compassion and concern for the welfare of others. It “is patient,” manifesting itself in being forbearing and having the capacity to endure difficult or trying circumstances without giving way to complaint or resentment. “Love is kind,” responding in a caring and compassionate way to fellow humans. It is “not jealous,” looking with envy or resentment at what others may have or be able to enjoy. (13:4)

Love is not given to self-praise. Those who have genuine love for fellow humans do not resort to boasting or bragging so as to make themselves appear superior to them. Love has nothing in common with an inordinate view of self that causes one to look down on others. The loving person is not “puffed up” or swollen with conceit, putting on airs. (13:4)

Love never manifests itself in indecent, shameful, rude, or crude ways or acts. It is a quality that is devoid of any hint of seeking its own interests and demanding its own way. Love is actively concerned with the welfare of fellow humans and is the very opposite of selfishness. The loving person looks at others with a humane spirit and, therefore, is not easily provoked or irritated by their failings. Appropriately, Paul said of love, “It is not provoked.” Love is not resentful, keeping a tally of hurt (either real or imagined) that one may have experienced on account of the thoughtless words or actions of others. The loving person does not look for opportunities to even the score. (13:5)

When love is at work, injustices, wrongs, or harmful developments are never the basis for rejoicing. Those who care about fellow humans do not take advantage of them. They are not like those who find delight in besting others through manipulation and deceit. The loving person finds no delight when fellow humans disgrace themselves or experience humiliation. Even when others may have been hateful, the loving person does not take pleasure in their misfortune. (13:6)

Love “rejoices with the truth.” Whatever contributes to the advancement of the things that are true, right, or proper brings joy to those who seek to be loving persons. (13:6)

Love “bears all things,” distinguishing itself by a willingness to make allowances, to forego personal rights out of regard for the conscientious scruples of others, and to view fellow humans with a reasonable disposition. When described as believing “all things,” love is not being identified as gullible and ready to believe lies and misrepresentations. This would not agree with the description that love “rejoices with the truth.” Love “believes” in that it is not suspicious, putting the worst construction possible on the words and actions of

others. Unless there is clear evidence to the contrary, the loving person is willing to give fellow humans the benefit of the doubt. (13:7)

### **Verses 8b-13. Permanence of love.**

Love “hopes all things,” not easily giving up on others. Those who endeavour to be loving in their dealings believe in the possibility for improvement and betterment and are willing to wait patiently as they seek to be a positive influence for good. Love “endures all things,” not lashing out or complaining bitterly when difficulties are encountered. The loving person seeks to make the best of the existing circumstances and does not resort to lawless ways in an attempt to force changes. (13:7)

“Love never fails.” The context suggests that this is not to be understood to mean that love always succeeds. Rather, as a quality, love is eternal. Unlike a stream that may fail, drying up during the hot summer or a period of drought, this will never happen to love. The miraculous gifts that existed when Paul addressed his words to the Corinthians were not to continue indefinitely. “Prophecies,” “tongues,” and “knowledge” would all cease. The gift of miraculous knowledge did not mean that the possessors thereof had the fullness of knowledge. For this reason, this gift of knowledge would cease upon being replaced by that which was complete. (13:8)

Paul acknowledged that both the knowing and the prophesying were solely “in part.” God had not revealed everything. The full revelation would come at a future time, and whatever is partial would then come to an end. Paul did not specify what he meant when referring to the coming of the “complete,” the “perfect,” or the “finished.” What he wrote in his preserved letters reveals that he looked forward to Jesus’ return in glory. So it seems reasonable to conclude that, upon Christ’s return with power and great splendor at a time that has not been disclosed, everything that had only been dimly or partially perceived will become clear. One’s recognizing the partial nature of present knowledge should restrain dogmatism and speculation, which often give rise to an unloving and divisive disposition. (13:9, 10)

Illustrating that growth in knowledge is to be expected, Paul referred to his own infancy or childhood. As a “babe” or a young child, he spoke, thought, and reasoned like a child. Upon becoming a man, he did not retain these childish ways, but he gave them up. (13:11)

Applying the illustration involving the end of the ways of childhood, the apostle continued, “For now we see obscurely [literally, ‘in an enigma’ or ‘in a riddle’]

by a mirror, but then [it will be] face to face. Now I am known in part, but then I will know fully even as I have been fully known.” The commonly used metal mirrors of ancient times did not provide a clear reflection. Likewise, the existing partial knowledge did not and still does not enable one to ascertain the fullness of the knowledge yet to be revealed. When the Son of God returns in glory, all that is partial will give way to that which is complete, making it possible to know fully or to perceive as one does when seeing face to face. Paul’s reference to having been fully known (literally, “I was recognized” or “I was [fully] known”) does not appear to apply to the kind of knowledge humans had of him. Not even he knew himself fully, but Jesus Christ and his Father truly did know him. Viewed from the standpoint of Christ’s return, Paul would come to have the kind of knowledge that the Son of God had of him. (13:12)

Whereas the apostle had indicated that the miraculous gifts would cease, faith, hope, and love would remain. An approved relationship with God and Christ continues to rest on faith, and the fulfilment of the divine promises is yet future, making hope essential. Faith relates to the things we do not see. When that which is yet unseen becomes a tangible reality, faith in connection with that particular aspect is no longer needed. Likewise, hope is no longer needed when what we hope for becomes our possession. Faith or trust finds its fulfillment through sight. Hope is realized when the hoped-for object comes into one’s possession. Accordingly, in relation to their object or objects, faith and hope are subject to transformation. Love, however, is constant. In the case of love, sight and possession do not produce the kind of change that is associated with faith and hope. This makes love the greatest of the three. God is neither faith nor hope. He is love. This is the attribute that is the manifestation of his complete identity. (13:13)

### Notes:

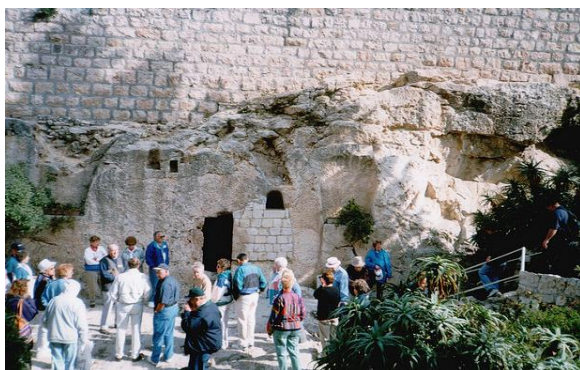
In 1 Corinthians 13:3, numerous later manuscripts do not contain the Greek word meaning “boast” (*kauchaómai*). Instead, they use a form of the Greek word (*kaío*), which means “kindle” or “burn.”

By referring to the traits of infancy (in 13:11), Paul may also have been implying that the Corinthians needed to give up their infantile ways. Their wrong view of humans and the miraculous gifts were characteristic of babes and not persons who had attained the desirable maturity of members of Christ’s body. (3:1-3)

In 1 Corinthians 13:12, the Greek verb that can be rendered “fully known” is *epiginósko* and basically denotes knowledge that is obtained by fixing attention



upon someone or something. Other meanings for the Greek word are “recognize,” “acknowledge acquaintance with,” and “perceive.”



*Open door of tomb at Calvary Garden*



*Tomb at Calvary Garden*

## **1 Corinthians 14:1-40**

### **14. Abuse of the sign gifts**

#### **Verses 1-11. The superiority of prophecy over tongues**

Paul urged the Corinthians to pursue love, making it their aim to manifest it in all their dealings with others. His emphasis on love did not mean that he intended to minimize the value of the spiritual gifts. He did, in fact, encourage the believers to be “zealous” for these endowments, particularly the gift of prophesying. For the Corinthian believers to be zealous for the spiritual gifts would have meant to value all of them and to let all these endowments function for the benefit of the whole congregation. Especially prophesying, with its focus on consoling, edifying, strengthening, encouraging, and admonishing others, served to promote the spiritual well-being of the entire community of believers. (14:1)

Whenever no one present could translate the “tongue” being spoken, the one making expressions in an unknown language would not be speaking to “men” or to other persons, “but to God.” This would be because God understood what was being said, whereas no one else “heard” or listened with any comprehension. “To [the] spirit,” the individual would be speaking “mysteries.” This could mean that the expressions were made by or under the influence of God’s spirit. There is also a possibility that the reference is to the individual’s own spirit. (See verses 14 and 15, where Paul used the expression “my spirit.”) In that case, the speaking would be without conscious thought or previous reflection but with the intense feeling or emotion reflective of the person’s spirit or deep inner self under the power of the Holy Spirit. Likely the “mysteries” related to matters involving God’s will, which, though formerly undisclosed, would be expressed by the one speaking in a tongue. Another possible meaning is that, because of being spoken in a language the hearers did not understand, the words remained a mystery to them. (14:2)

The one who prophesied did speak to “men” or to others, conveying a message that served to build up or edify, encourage, or console them. (14:3) Persons who spoke in a tongue that no one else in the group understood would only be building themselves up and not the community of believers as a whole. Certain ones among the Corinthians with the gift of tongues prided themselves in having this evidence of the spirit’s operation (the very evidence that marked the reception of the spirit on the first day of Pentecost after Jesus’ resurrection and ascension to heaven) and made a show of it, making themselves seem superior to those who could not speak in tongues. (14:4)

Although problems had arisen among the Corinthian believers in connection with the gift of tongues, Paul would have wanted all of them to have this gift. His preference, though, would have been for all of them to be able to prophesy. On account of the greater good resulting to the community as a whole from prophesying (edifying, consoling, and encouraging), the apostle referred to the one who prophesied as being greater than the one who spoke in a tongue. Paul, however, included an exception. The speaking in a tongue did build up or edify the congregation when the message was translated. (14:5)

By means of a question, the apostle continued to stress the importance of imparting something valuable to the “brothers” or fellow believers. If he came to them speaking in tongues, how would they benefit unless he conveyed to them a revelation or knowledge or a prophecy or a teaching? The question implied that something meaningful would have to be imparted, something that the Corinthians could understand and from which they could derive benefit. An expression of a revelatory nature relating to God and Christ, a clarification of



God's will, an utterance that would serve to edify, encourage, or console, or a teaching about aspects of their life as believers would be more directly linked to the superior gifts of wisdom, knowledge, and prophecy. (14:6)

Illustrating the importance of meaningful expressions, Paul, with a rhetorical question, pointed out that inanimate or lifeless instruments, like a flute or a harp, can be used to produce sounds. Unless, however, the sounds are distinct notes, no one will recognize what is being played on the flute or the harp. (14:7) In the first century, armies commonly used trumpets as signaling instruments. If, though, the trumpet sounded indistinctly, who would have gotten "ready for battle"? Without a clear signal, the warriors would not have known what action they were to take. (14:8)

Likewise, Paul reasoned, speech needed to be intelligible for it to be understood. If no one comprehended what was being said, the one talking would have been "speaking into the air," with nothing of value to anyone. (14:9)

The apostle acknowledged that there must be a great variety of "sounds [probably denoting those used for communication] in the world." When mentioning that no sound is "soundless," Paul appears to have meant that no sound is without any significance. (14:10)

Nevertheless, if he did not "know" or understand the "power" or intent of the "sound," he would be a foreigner to the speaker and the speaker would be a foreigner to him. Thus, by implication, Paul indicated that the manner in which the Corinthians were making use of the gift of tongues made them foreigners to their own brothers in the faith. (14:11)

### **Verses 12-40. Correction of the abuse of tongues**

Although the Corinthians were "zealous of spirits," that is, eager for spiritual gifts, they needed to "abound" or "excel" in them for the benefit of the congregation, contributing to the upbuilding of all. Guided by love for fellow believers, the gifts would serve for the mutual strengthening and encouraging of everyone. (14:12)

From the standpoint of the community of believers as a whole, the gift of tongues needed to be enhanced through the gift of translation or interpretation. For this reason, Paul encouraged the one with the gift of tongues to pray for the ability to translate. (14:13)

Referring to himself to illustrate the matter of speaking only in a tongue, Paul said that his "spirit" would be praying but his "mind" would be "unfruitful."

Utterances originating from his spirit or inner being under the influence of God's spirit would flow from his mouth with intense feeling, but he would not be mentally involved in formulating his words. (14:14) Also his speaking in a tongue that fellow believers could not understand would be unproductive from the standpoint of not providing anything of spiritual value to them.

He then raised the question, "What, then, is it [that I should do]?" His answer could be understood in one of two ways. (1) There would be times when he would pray in or by the spirit, expressing himself in a tongue according to the prompting of his inmost self as guided by Holy Spirit, and at other times he would pray with his mind, with fully engaged mental faculties when formulating his words. He would sing in or by the spirit, with the praise that he expressed in a tongue being the product of his inner self under the influence of God's spirit, and he, with his mind fully involved, would sing or raise his voice in praise. (2) He would not limit himself to praying and singing in a tongue without engaging his mental faculties. Instead, he would do the praying and singing both with his spirit (with his inmost self) and his mind, thereby using his divinely imparted gift for the benefit of fellow believers. (14:15)

Paul next made an application to the one saying a blessing "in spirit," that is, the one doing so in a tongue under the power of the spirit. How would the one who did not understand the words be able to say in response, "Amen" (so be it)? (14:16) The words of thanksgiving may have been expressed well in the tongue, but the one who did not understand them would not be built up or edified. All he would have heard would have been unintelligible sounds. (14:17)

The apostle had been endowed with the gift of tongues and was grateful to God that he spoke more miraculously granted languages than all of the Corinthians. (14:18) Still, when believers were assembled as a congregation, he would prefer to speak "five words" with his mind, words they would understand and from which they could derive benefit, "than ten thousand words in a tongue," which would be meaningless to them and would fail to impart anything of value. (14:19)

When it came to thinking or understanding, Paul desired his Corinthian brothers (fellow believers) not to be children or inexperienced persons who lacked the insight to make use of their spiritual gifts for the well-being of the congregation. They did, however, need to be like babes respecting badness, living their lives free from the corrupt and debased actions and thoughts of a world at enmity with God. In all other respects, their objective should have been to be mature in their thinking or understanding. The error into which the Corinthians had fallen in

regard to the gift of tongues made it apparent that it was essential for them to strive for maturity. (14:20)

To aid them to correct their thinking, Paul continued to reason with them. He referred to a passage from Isaiah as being written “in the law,” using the term “law” in the sense of instruction (as expressed in the Torah), and then quoted the words, “With other tongues and with other lips, I will speak to this people, and neither thus will they hear me, says the Lord.” In the time of Isaiah, this occurred when armies invaded the land, speaking a language that was foreign to the Israelites who had disregarded YHWH’s law and the messages he conveyed to them through his prophets. (14:21)

Based on the words of Isaiah, the apostle pointed out that tongues served as a sign for unbelievers, not believers. As a consequence of their unbelief or lack of faith as evident from their disregard of God’s law, the Israelites experienced enemy invasions and heard “other tongues” and “other lips.” That development was a confirmatory sign of their unbelief, for it was part of the judgment against them for their unfaithfulness to God. Accordingly, for certain Corinthian believers to speak in a tongue that all the other fellow believers did not understand would be treating their own brothers like unbelievers, persons without faith. In this way, they would have made God a foreigner to them, not a friend and loving Father. (14:22)

Prophecy, on the other hand, was for believers, not unbelievers. The message of prophets was not conveyed in language that the congregation did not speak or understand. Their words served to edify, console, and encourage the entire community of believers in a meaningful way. (14:22)

A mere speaking in tongues without the benefit of translation could also have a potential negative effect on unbelievers. If an entire group of believers were assembled at one location and all were speaking in tongues at the same time, an outsider (not a fellow believer) who witnessed this would conclude that they had lost their senses. (14:23)

If an outsider (not a fellow believer) entered the place where believers had assembled and all of them were prophesying, this could result in positive good. The individual would hear admonition regarding God’s will, and it would become clear to him wherein he failed to measure up to the lofty divine standard. He would thus be reprovved and examined, called to account, or judged. His hearing God’s requirements would expose his own words, thoughts, and deeds as disapproved. (14:24)

The “hidden [things] of his heart,” including the motives and disposition that were the reflection of his inmost self, would become manifest. Based on what he heard, he could be deeply moved and come to recognize the assembled believers as God’s people. In that case, he would fall to his knees and prostrate himself in worship, saying, “God is surely among you.” (14:25)

Answering the question about what should take place when his Corinthian “brothers” assembled, Paul indicated that the contribution all would be making should serve for the upbuilding of the whole congregation. The expressions made could be in the form of a “psalm” or a song of praise, a “teaching” (including the imparting of knowledge regarding God’s will and purpose), a “revelation” (as would be related by one with the prophetic gift), and a message spoken in a tongue and then translated for the benefit of everyone present. (14:26)

The apostle recommended that the speaking in tongues be limited to “two or three at the most,” with each speaker taking turns and someone doing the translating. (14:27) In the event no one present had the gift of interpretation of tongues, Paul admonished that the person with the gift of tongues should not make a display of it but should remain silent, speaking “to himself and to God.” When the message conveyed in a tongue could not be understood by the congregation, it would not have served for the edification of those assembled. For this reason, the individual would appropriately make use of the gift in communing with God, the one who did understand the tongue. (14:28)

During the course of the meeting of the congregation, two or three prophets might speak. Thereafter the words of the prophets were to be evaluated, weighed, or judged. Believers with the gift to discern “spirits” (12:10) would then need to use that gift for the benefit of the congregation, making clear whether the prophetic message was indeed from God. Those assembled were not to be passive listeners who simply accepted everything that might be said. They were to be concerned about confirming the truth of the spoken word and thereafter to make it their own. (14:29)

In the event a revelation would be imparted to a prophet who was seated while one of the other prophets related his message, the believer with the new revelation was not to relate it until the first prophet had finished speaking. Based on the comments that follow, this is the apparent meaning of the words, “Let the first [one] be silent.” It seems less likely that Paul recommended that the one speaking should stop immediately and let the one with the new revelation start speaking. Without a signal from the seated believer or without miraculous

discernment, the first prophet would not have known about the new revelation. (14:30)

Prophets were to take turns in relating their respective messages, not talking at the same time. This would make it possible for all assembled to learn from each prophet and to be encouraged by their words. (14:31)

Upon receiving a revelation, a prophet was not simultaneously impelled to express it. This appears to be the significance of Paul's words, "And the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets." The "spirits" or the spirit-imparted revelations came into their possession in order for them to make them known at appropriate times. The prophets had full control over when and where they would proclaim the message they had received. This served to prevent disorder, with more than one prophet speaking at the same time. (14:32)

When prophets took their turns in speaking during meetings of the congregation, this proved to be in harmony with what God has revealed about himself. Paul added, "For God is [a God], not of disorder, but of peace." The creation does not reflect an unpredictable state of chaos. If the prophets had all spoken at the same time, this could not have been described as orderly and peaceful, tranquil, or harmonious. (14:33) Likewise, the use of all the other gifts should have been a reflection of the one by whom they were given, God.

The maintenance of proper decorum in "all the congregations of the holy ones" (communities of believers who are holy on the basis of their faith in Christ and the resultant purity of their lives) included the way in which women conducted themselves when believers assembled. (14:33)

At such times, the women or wives were to be "silent," not disruptive, comporting themselves as respectful listeners and learners. This would be in keeping with the subordinate role of women in the family arrangement. It would have been contrary to the sense of modesty and propriety for a woman to step out of her role as a wife under her husband's headship and to teach him and other husbands publicly. (14:34)

Paul appealed to the backing of the law for this position regarding a woman's proper place as one in subjection to her husband. (14:34) The law revealed that Adam was created first and that the woman was deceived, whereas Adam was not. (1 Timothy 2:13, 14) Accordingly, in relation to her husband by reason of his priority, the first woman was in the position of a learner, not a teacher. When she assumed a role of teaching him something contrary to what he knew about the forbidden fruit, she did so as a person who had been deceived.

If a woman wanted clarification about something that may have come up while the congregation was assembled, she could ask her husband about it in the privacy of their home. It would have been disgraceful for a woman to have become disruptive, speaking out and raising questions. It appears that there were women in Corinth who mistook their spiritual equality with men as authorizing them to assume a teaching role, expressing their views and raising challenging questions. The manner in which they comported themselves appears to have been disruptive to the order and peace of the congregation. (14:35; see the Notes section.)

Because many of the Corinthians had acted contrary to the expected standards of orderliness and propriety, Paul asked, “Did the word of God come forth from you, or did it reach only to you?” The community of believers in Corinth was just one of many, and the “word of God” or the message regarding his Son and what he accomplished through him had not originated with the Corinthians. At the time Paul began to proclaim the glad tidings about Jesus Christ in Corinth, other congregations were already in existence. Moreover, the “word of God” had reached many other places besides Corinth. Therefore, the Corinthians had no basis for initiating practices that departed from the pattern all the other congregations followed. (14:36)

Believers who truly were prophets and spiritual persons or possessors of spiritual gifts would have been moved to acknowledge the rightness of what Paul had written, for, as he added, they were the “Lord’s commandment.” Jesus Christ had consistently upheld the principles set forth in the law, referring to the account about Adam and Eve as revealing his Father’s purpose respecting the marriage arrangement. (Genesis 2:22-24; Matthew 19:4-6) Accordingly, anyone who considered himself to be a prophet, or to have spiritual endowments, should have accepted what the apostle said. If, though, someone refused to accept the truth of Paul’s words, then such a one could remain in his stubborn ignorance. The apostle expressed this bluntly, “But if anyone be ignorant, let him be ignorant.” (14:37, 38 [This rendering of verse 38 has the support of P46 (c. 200 CE), fourth-century Codex Vaticanus, and many other manuscripts; see the Notes section.]])

He continued to lay stress on the gift of prophecy because of its great potential for benefiting the entire community of believers, telling the Corinthians to “be zealous to prophesy.” While they were to be eager to let this gift be used to the full, Paul did not want them to overact in connection with the gift of tongues. The Corinthians may have been inclined to stop all speaking in tongues to prevent the kind of abuses that had occurred, but he instructed them not to forbid

the speaking in tongues. Their concern when assembling was to be that everything occurred in a fitting and orderly manner. (14:39, 40)

### **Notes:**

In 1 Corinthians 14:21, the quotation from Isaiah differs from the extant Septuagint text. The wording of the quotation from Isaiah 28:11 reflects the meaning of the Masoretic Text and the Dead Sea Scroll of Isaiah. Although Paul used the first person singular (instead of the third person singular), this did not alter the significance of the quotation, for the speaker is still YHWH. The extant Septuagint text of Isaiah 28:11 and part of verse 12 reads, “[It is] because of contempt of lips, through another tongue, that they will speak to this people, saying to them, This [is] the rest for the one hungering.”

Both the Hebrew text and the extant Septuagint text include the words about not “hearing” (or “listening”) at the end of Isaiah 28:12, but these words follow a positive message conveyed to the Israelites prior to the time they would be hearing the foreign speech. It appears that Paul, for his purpose, appropriated the words about not hearing, doing so with specific application to the tongues that would have sounded like gibberish to the Israelites. When the prophetic words of Isaiah were fulfilled, the people heard enemy warriors communicate in an incomprehensible language. Through these foreigners, God spoke in a manner the Israelites did not “hear” or understand. It can also be said that he thus spoke to them in expression of his judgment, but they did not listen to him and change their ways. Translations commonly render the words of 1 Corinthians 14:21 to mean that, when God would speak to them “with other tongues and with other lips,” the people still would not pay any attention to him.

Paul’s admonition about evaluating, judging, or examining the words of the prophets (14:29) points up the error of the controlling elements in movements who insist that their interpretations of the Scriptures be accepted without being submitted to careful scrutiny. Since the utterances of believers with the miraculous gift of prophecy were to be submitted to evaluation, how much more so should the words (whether spoken or written) of those who do not have this gift! Believers have a personal responsibility to use all their God-given abilities to make sure that what they are being told is in harmony with the example and teaching of their Lord Jesus Christ.

Earlier (in 11:4-16), Paul discussed the matter of women praying and prophesying but doing so with their heads covered. Here (in 14:34, 35), his words about not permitting women or wives to speak apparently relate to a different situation, for this prohibition appears in a context that specifically deals

with the maintenance of proper order and decorum. This suggests that certain women in Corinth had engaged in disruptive speaking and questioning and had acted out of harmony with the manner in which the family arrangement was divinely ordained to function. Paul did not include specifics about the improper speaking. Therefore, although the Corinthians would have understood exactly what the apostle addressed, we today do not.

In a number of manuscripts, the words of verses 34 and 35 appear after verse 40. Based on this transposition and a perceived inconsistency between the discussion about women praying and prophesying with their heads covered (11:4-16) and the directive that they be silent in the congregation, some have regarded verses 34 and 35 of chapter 14 as a later interpolation. There is, however, no ancient manuscript support for this conjecture, and the passage in 1 Corinthians 14 can be understood in a way that does not contradict Paul's earlier comments in 1 Corinthians 11.

The Greek word *agnoéo* (appearing twice in 14:38) can refer to "being ignorant" or "not being recognized." In the case of the second occurrence of this verb, numerous manuscripts contain the passive form (instead of the imperative form found in other manuscripts, including P46). Many translators have chosen to render the verb according to its passive significance but with different interpretive meanings. "Anyone who does not recognize this is not to be recognized." (NRSV) "If he does not acknowledge this, his own claim cannot be acknowledged." (REB) "So don't pay attention to anyone who ignores what I am writing." (CEV) "Those who ignore this will be ignored by God." (NCV) "If anyone does not recognise this, it is because that person is not recognised himself." (NJB)

## **1 Corinthians 15:1-58**

### **15. The doctrine of resurrection**

#### **15: 1-19. The fact and import of Christ's resurrection**

##### **Verses 1-11. The fact of Christ's resurrection**

To indicate a change in subject, Paul used the word *δέ* (commonly meaning "but"), which here may be understood to denote "now" ("Now I want to make known to you"). His "making known" the evangel or good news he had proclaimed was from the standpoint of reminding his "brothers" (fellow believers in Corinth) about what he had taught them. This was because certain ones were advancing a view about the resurrection that did not harmonize with the glad tidings about Christ. In response to the apostle's initial preaching, the



Corinthians had accepted the evangel and, as persons who continued to adhere to it as trustworthy, they could be spoken of as “standing” in it. (15:1)

The good news that focused on Christ revealed how sinful humans could be forgiven of their transgressions and be saved or delivered from being condemned as persons who failed to reflect God’s image. When the Corinthians accepted the evangel, they responded in faith to Christ and the forgiveness of sins made possible through his death. Therefore, “through” the glad tidings about the Son of God, the “word” or message Paul had proclaimed to them, “they were also saved,” provided they continued to adhere to it. If they did not maintain their firm hold on the “good news,” their initial faith in the message the apostle had made known to them would have proved to be in vain. (15:2)

He handed on to them the same word or message that he had received. The expression that literally means “in first things” could be understood to signify that the teachings Paul next mentioned were of first importance when he shared this message with the Corinthians. He taught them “that Christ died for our sins” and that this occurred “according to the Scriptures.” (15:3)

Likely the apostle had in mind prophecies in Isaiah and Zechariah. “He was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed.” (Isaiah 53:5, NRSV) “He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.” (Isaiah 53:7, NRSV) “And I [YHWH] will pour out a spirit of compassion and supplication on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that, when they look on the one whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him.” (Zechariah 12:10, NRSV) “On that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity.” (Zechariah 13:1, NRSV)

After being buried, Christ “was raised on the third day.” This also took place “according to the Scriptures.” (15:4) From the book of Acts, we know that Paul used words from Psalms (16:10; 15:10, LXX) to show that Christ was foretold to rise from the dead. “You will not permit your holy one to see corruption.” (Acts 13:35) While Jesus was on earth, he referred to the sign of Jonah as indicating that he would be resurrected on the third day, and the apostle may have had this in mind. (Jonah 1:17; Matthew 12:40) There is also a possibility that Paul may have thought about a reference in Hosea (6:2, LXX), “On the third day, we will rise and live before him.”

Cephas (the Semitic form of the name “Peter,” meaning “rock”) was the first apostle to see the risen Christ. The occasion on which Jesus later appeared to the “twelve” seems to have been when Thomas was present. (John 20:26, 27) At that time, the apostles numbered eleven, which suggests that Paul used the designation “the twelve” as representative of the entire company of the apostles. (15:5)

It must have been at a mountain in Galilee that the risen Christ appeared to upward of 500 brothers, most of whom were still alive when Paul sent his letter to the Corinthians. (15:6) This appears to have been the meeting Christ had prearranged, as suggested by the fact that so many were assembled at one place. (Matthew 28:10, 16) According to Matthew 28:17, “some doubted.” This could not have applied to the apostles, for they had been fully convinced that Christ had been resurrected. Even the previous doubts of Thomas had been completely overcome. This reference to doubts confirms that the account in Matthew refers to a meeting with more disciples than the apostles. Considering the difficulty even the apostles had in believing the reports about Christ’s resurrection, one can readily see why there may have been some who doubted after their seeing him for the first time since his rising from the dead.

Paul mentioned that some of the upward of 500 brothers had fallen asleep in death. (15:6) Included among those who had died was the apostle James whom Herod Agrippa I had executed with the sword. (Acts 12:1, 2)

The James to whom Jesus appeared next could not have been the apostle James, the brother of John. He was among the apostles who had previously seen the resurrected Son of God. So it must have been the James who was widely known among believers. (15:7) This would have been “James the brother of the Lord.” Like his other brothers, he did not become a believer during the early period of Jesus’ ministry. (John 7:3-5; Mark 6:3; Galatians 1:19) It may well be that Jesus’ post-resurrection appearance eliminated all his former doubts and moved him to put faith in him as the promised Messiah and God’s beloved Son.

The time “all the apostles” saw Jesus probably is to be linked to his last appearance. (15:7) The fact that they are not referred to as “the twelve” suggests that the group included other men. Matthias, the replacement for Judas Iscariot, may have been one in this group. (Acts 1:6-26)

Last of all, Jesus appeared to Paul, as if to one of “abnormal birth” (*éktroma*). The Greek term *éktroma* can denote an untimely birth, miscarriage, or a birth later than the usual term. Paul seems to have used this designation to indicate something disparaging about himself. Perhaps he meant to indicate that his

situation at the time Jesus appeared to him resembled that of a prematurely born infant that had no opportunity for life, no name, and no potential for anything that life might have to offer. (15:8)

None of the disciples numbered among “the twelve” had ever been active opposers. Paul, however, had been a rabid persecutor of the “congregation of God.” As persons purchased with the precious blood of Jesus Christ, believers belonged to his Father and so were his people or his congregation. When Paul had his encounter with the risen Christ, he was on a mission to arrest believers in Damascus and to bring them to Jerusalem for punishment. (Acts 7:58-8:1; 9:1-6; 22:4-9; 26:9-15) In view of his past record as a persecutor, Paul acknowledged himself to be the “least of the apostles” and unfit to be called an apostle. (15:9)

He attributed his being an apostle (“I am what I am”) to God’s favour or unmerited kindness. This favour had not been extended to him in vain, for he labored in the advancement of Christ’s cause to a greater extent than all the other apostles. Nevertheless, he did not take personal credit for his hard work but minimized his own role, adding that he was able to accomplish what he did by the “favour of God” that was with him. Divine aid strengthened and sustained him in carrying out his ministry. (15:10)

Although Paul laboured harder than the other apostles, he and they proclaimed the same message, which the Corinthians had come to believe. A prominent part of this message related to Christ’s death and resurrection. (15:11)

### **Verses 12-19. Christ’s resurrection the basis of ours.**

The reliable testimony of many witnesses established that Jesus had been resurrected. Appropriately, therefore, Paul asked, “Now if Christ is proclaimed as having been raised from the dead, how can some among you say there is no resurrection of the dead?” Jesus’ resurrection confirmed the certain fulfillment of the hope that the dead would live again as the very same persons. (15:12)

A denial of the resurrection would constitute a rejection of the reality of Christ’s resurrection. If he was not raised from the dead, all of Paul’s hard work would have been for nothing. Apparently using the editorial first person plural, the apostle continued, “Our proclamation [would be] in vain, and your [our, according to other manuscripts] faith [would be] in vain.” (15:13, 14)

Besides having exerted himself in a meaningless endeavor, Paul would have been guilty of spreading false testimony about God. He would have been telling others that God resurrected Christ, whereas, if there is no resurrection of the dead, he had not done so. (15:15; see the Notes section.)

The resurrection hope is so inextricably linked to the reality of Christ's resurrection that the apostle could say, "For if the dead are not raised, neither has Christ been raised." (15:16) There would have been no basis for the Corinthians to have faith in the Son of God if he had not been raised from the dead. His resurrection confirmed that he was God's Son and not just another notable teacher or prophet whose life ended prematurely and whose death could not provide deliverance from the condemnation of sin. Rejection of the reality of Christ's resurrection would have made the faith of the Corinthians useless, for it would have left them without hope and in the same sinful condition existing prior to their response to Paul's proclamation. They would have continued to be in their sins, with no basis existing for forgiveness and reconciliation with God as his beloved children. (15:17)

This also would have meant that those who had fallen asleep in death as persons "in Christ," or as believers at one with him as members of his body, perished. They would have died without any hope of their ever living again as the same persons. (15:18)

In the world alienated from and at enmity with God, believers endured much distress. They were often the objects of intense hostility. So, "if in this life only we have hoped in Christ [with everything terminating at death]," Paul reasoned, "we of all men are to be pitied." The lot of believers would indeed have been tragic if the suffering and reproach they bore for the sake of Christ would finally all be for nothing. (15:19)

### **15:20-23. Christ's resurrection and ours**

#### **Verses 20-23. Christ's resurrection a guarantee of ours**

"Now, however, Christ has been raised from the dead, [the] firstfruits of those asleep [in death]." As the first one to be resurrected to immortal life, Jesus Christ is the firstfruits. His resurrection assured that many more would be raised from the dead, just as the ingathering of the firstfruits is followed by the major harvest. (15:20)

#### **Verses 21-33. Christ's resurrection the divine remedy for the Fall**

Death came into the world of humankind through a man—the first man, Adam. While on earth, Jesus Christ also was a man and, through him, resurrection from the dead came to be a certainty. (15:21)

In Adam, the original progenitor of the human family, all his descendants are dying. As a sinner, he could only father sinful offspring under the condemnation

of death. In Christ, though, “all will be made alive.” God’s unique Son, the sinless one, is in possession of life-giving power. (John 5:26-29) In him, therefore, resides the life that makes resurrection possible. (15:22)

The resurrection takes place according to a specific “order” (*táγμα*). Having been the first to rise from the dead, Christ is the firstfruits. Thereafter those who belong to him come to life at his “arrival” (*parousía*). The Greek word *parousía* denotes “presence,” “advent,” or “arrival” and here applies to Jesus’ return in the capacity of king and judge. (15:23)

## **15: 24-28. Resurrection and the final consummation**

### **Verses 24-26. The final abrogation of death**

When referring to the “end” (“next the end”), Paul appears to have meant the conclusion or fulfilment of Christ’s work, his reducing to nothingness all dominion, authority and power that is hostile to his Father. Once he has accomplished this, Jesus Christ will hand over the kingdom or the royal authority he exercised in destroying everything that is out of harmony with God’s will and purpose. The handing over of the kingdom signifies that his Father will then be the Sovereign over everything without there being any elements in a state of enmity with him. (15:24)

Jesus Christ acts as his Father’s agent. For this reason, Paul could speak of Christ as reigning until “God has placed all enemies under his feet,” granting him the complete triumph comparable to trampling upon them. (15:25)

Death is the “last enemy” to be deprived of might. When Christ uses his God-given power to resurrect the dead (John 5:26-28), death is defeated, unable to keep the dead in its unyielding grip. (15:26)

### **Verses 27-28. The second state**

Drawing on the words of Psalm 8:6(7), Paul continued, “For [God] subjected all things under his [Christ’s] feet.” As a man on earth, Jesus Christ was lower than the angels (Psalm 8:5(6); Hebrews 2:7), but that ceased to be the case when he rose from the dead. His Father then gave him “all authority in heaven and on earth.” (Matthew 28:18) Subjection to that authority could be expressed by acknowledging Jesus Christ as Lord in full support of his Father’s will. Otherwise, the subjection would take the form of utter defeat, for the Father would let his Son vanquish everyone and everything that remained out of harmony with his purpose. (15:27)

Next the apostle called attention to a fact that is self-evident. “All” or everything that is subjected to Christ does not include his Father, “the one who subjected all things to him.” (15:27) When all things have been subjected to Christ, he will subject himself to his Father, “so that God may be all in all.” To all, God will then be the Sovereign in the ultimate sense, and he will be in complete harmony with all, working in and through them for the accomplishment of his will and purpose. (15:28)

### **15:29-34. Christ’s resurrection and new incentives**

#### **Verse 29. The incentive to be baptised for the dead**

Continuing to develop his argument about the resurrection, Paul raised the questions, “What will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are they also baptized for them?” (15:29; see the Notes section.) While the Corinthians knew exactly what Paul meant, we today cannot be certain.

One view is that some in Corinth got baptized for persons who had died before being able to get immersed. If the reference is to vicarious baptism (as Tertullian [c. 160-c. 221 CE] concluded [On the Resurrection of the Flesh, chapter XLVIII]), there is no need to regard Paul’s questions as endorsing the practice. The apostle’s mentioning it served his purpose to call attention to a contradiction. Such an act would have been completely meaningless if the dead are not to be raised to life. In view of other innovations the Corinthians introduced, it is not completely inconceivable that the practice started among them and that this is a matter Paul may have planned to handle when again with them. (15:29; compare 11:34.)

Another possible explanation that has gained a measure of acceptance is understanding the questions to relate to baptism with suffering and death in view. For one to become a disciple of God’s Son included the possibility of having to face death for his sake. (Compare Mark 10:38, 39; Luke 12:50.) The Greek wording, though, is not specific enough to suggest this significance.

#### **Verses 30-34. The incentive to live dangerously**

Either using the editorial first person plural “we” or including his close associates, Paul raised the question, “Why also are we in danger every hour?” Would it have made any sense for the apostle constantly to expose himself to danger, having his life repeatedly threatened because of being a disciple of Jesus Christ, if there was no resurrection hope? (15:30)

So real was the risk of death that Paul said, “I die every day.” If it had not been for his service in the cause of Christ, he would not have faced constant peril. The apostle affirmed his words about dying daily, implying that this proved to be just as certain as his boasting over or exulting in his Corinthian “brothers” or fellow believers. Based on his expressions, they knew that he did indeed take pride in them. He boasted “in Christ Jesus our Lord.” The apostle could speak of boasting in Christ because of being at one with him as a member of his corporate body. Paul could rightfully take pride in the Corinthians, for they were the fruit of his labour. This fruit from labouring in the service of his Lord made it worthwhile for the apostle to endure all the perils to which he had been exposed. (15:31; see the Notes section.)

Paul called attention to a grave danger he had faced in Ephesus. Concerning this, he raised the question, “If, according to man, I fought wild beasts in Ephesus, what benefit [was] this to me?” The expression “according to man” may be understood to mean “in the manner of humans,” “like a human,” “like an ordinary man without hope in Christ,” “for purely human reasons without the hope of a resurrection,” or “so to speak” (as an idiom). (15:32)

Paul’s words would seem to indicate that, while in Ephesus, he faced wild animals in an arena but escaped death. When (in 2 Corinthians 11:23-27) referring to the perils he had endured, however, he did not mention fighting wild beasts, and the incident is not included in the book of Acts. This suggests that he may not have been forced to engage in combat with wild animals but that he had to contend with vicious opposers who, like fierce predators, were determined to harm him. It would have been pointless for Paul to have continued pursuing a course that put him in harm’s way if the dead are not resurrected. He would have been better off to live according to the saying, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.” (15:32)

During the time of Isaiah, faithless Israelites expressed themselves to this effect. (Isaiah 22:13) Faced with Assyria’s threatened siege of Jerusalem, the people strengthened the city’s fortifications and secured the water supply, but they failed to look to YHWH, the sure source of dependable protection. The existing threat should have moved them to repentance and a rejection of their former lawless ways, but they chose to engage in unrestrained carousing (eating and drinking) in view of the possibility of death at the hands of enemy forces. For persons without faith and hope, this is the option they are inclined to adopt, and it would have appeared preferable for persons without any hope of a resurrection to get and secure as much pleasure out of life as possible. (Isaiah 22:9-14)

The Corinthians may have thought that freely associating with those who rejected the resurrection hope and listening to their arguments would do no harm. Paul, however, recognized the danger faithless companions posed and how destructive to faith their influence could be. He admonished the Corinthians not to be deceived and then added, “Bad companionships corrupt noble habits.” Ancient Greek dramatist Menander (342-292 BCE) expressed the same thought, and it is likely that the Corinthians were familiar with it. For the Corinthians to avoid having their faith undermined would have required being careful about whom they made their close associates, not allowing themselves to be deceived into thinking that faithless ones could not sway them with their arguments. (15:33)

With some among the Corinthians saying that there was no resurrection (15:12), the potential for spiritual harm was very real, calling for vigilance on the part of the others. Paul urged the Corinthians to become fully alert, sobering up in the right way as from a drunken stupor, and not to sin. When individuals cease to believe in the resurrection and any future accountability for their actions, this commonly leads to their adopting a way of life contrary to God’s ways. So there was good reason for the apostle to tell the Corinthians, “Do not sin.” The ones to whom he referred as being ignorant of God were those who denied the divine power that made the resurrection from the dead possible. (15:34)

### **15:35-58 Resurrection and conquest over death**

#### **Verses 35-49. The character of the resurrection body**

Paul’s strong language was designed to move the Corinthians to “shame,” causing them to recognize how wrong they had been in their reasoning. It should have been a cause for shame that, despite the overwhelming evidence regarding Christ’s resurrection, some among them denied the resurrection hope. There should also have been shame in the case of any who may have allowed themselves to be wrongly influenced by false teaching about the resurrection or who may have been very tolerant respecting such false teaching. (15:34)

Addressing those who argued against belief in the resurrection, Paul continued, “But someone will say, How are the dead to be raised, and with what kind of body are they coming [back]?” Any objectors would have known that dead bodies decayed, and the question implied that there were no existing bodies to be restored to life. (15:35)

From the apostle’s perspective, those who raised the issue about the resurrection were “senseless,” for they had not really given sufficient thought to their



conclusions. (15:36) Using illustrations from the physical world, Paul pointed out that the decay of the body had no bearing on the resurrection and that bodies of various kinds or forms existed.

“What you sow is not made alive unless it dies.” The sown seed ceases to exist, and the plant that develops bears no resemblance to a single seed. (15:36)

Therefore, as Paul continued, only a bare seed, either of wheat or of another grain, is sown. The sower does not sow the “body” or the plant in its developed form. (15:37)

According to Genesis 1:11, God created plants to produce according to their kind. Rightly, then, Paul could speak of God as giving to the sown seed a body just as he willed, and to each of the distinctive seeds its “own body” or plant form. (15:38)

The nature of animal and human bodies also differs. The flesh of humans, cattle, birds, and fish is not identical. (15:39)

Both heavenly bodies and earthly bodies exist, with the heavenly bodies having a distinctive glory or splendor and the earthly bodies having a different magnificence. The glory of the sun differs from that of the moon and from that of the stars. “Star differs from star in glory.” The widely different “earthly bodies” or forms of plant, animal, and human life possess their own distinctive glory, beauty, attractiveness, or suitability for their existence. In view of Paul’s reference to the sun, moon, and stars, he evidently did not use the expression “heavenly bodies” to mean bodies existing in the invisible spirit realm. Instead, he seems to have chosen to refer to things the Corinthians could readily see and observe. The perceivable brightness of the sun was much greater than that of the moon and of any of the stars that appeared as much smaller objects of light in the night sky. Even in the case of the stars, a difference in brightness could be seen. (15:40, 41)

Based on what the Corinthians could readily observe in the physical world, Paul made the application to the resurrection. “So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body; it is raised a spiritual body. If a physical body exists, a spiritual one also exists. And thus it is written [in Genesis 2:7], ‘The first man, Adam, became a living soul’; the last Adam [became] a life-giving spirit.” (15:42-45)

The human body is perishable, but the resurrection body is not of a perishable nature. It is incorruptible. When compared to the transcendent magnificence of

the immortal resurrection body that is free from the limitations associated with the present earthly existence, the physical human body appears to be in a state of humiliation and frailty. The contrast between the body of the first man, Adam, and the resurrection body of Jesus Christ, the “last Adam,” proves the existence of two different bodies—one earthly and the other heavenly. (15:42-44)

The first man, Adam, “became a living soul,” a physical being suited for an earthly existence and endowed with the capacity to father offspring. Jesus Christ, as a spirit person (no longer in his physical state as a man), is in possession of living-giving power. His Father has not granted nor will he grant this power to anyone else, making Jesus Christ the “last Adam.” As a life-giving spirit, he can impart life that transcends the physical life which has been passed on to all members of the human race through the procreation process that started with Adam. God’s unique Son can raise the dead to a newness of life on a far higher plane than that of the present physical existence. (15:45)

For humans, the physical life precedes the spiritual. “First” comes the physical (not the spiritual), then comes the spiritual. (15:46) The first man, Adam, was “from the earth, the dust,” his physical body consisting of earthly elements. This was not so with the second man. The Lord Jesus Christ is from heaven and, therefore, is “spiritual.” (15:47)

As Adam, the one from “dust” or from earthly elements, was physical in nature, so his descendants share the same nature, for all are also from “dust” or from earthly elements. Jesus Christ, the “heavenly one,” is “spiritual” in nature, and this would also be true of all other “heavenly ones.” In the context of his comments about the resurrection, Paul appears to have used the expression “heavenly ones” regarding believers who would come to be such, for he added, “And just as we have borne the image of the [man] of dust, we shall bear [let us bear, according to many other manuscripts] the image of the heavenly one.” The resurrection body of believers ceases to bear the image of the first earthling, Adam. Suited for life in the realm the Son of God occupies, the resurrection body bears his image, a heavenly one. (15:48, 49)

### **Verses 50-58; The change that produces the resurrection body**

For them to be united to Christ in his kingdom or royal realm, believers cannot continue to have a body appropriate only for an earthly existence. “But this I say, brothers,” Paul continued, “flesh and blood cannot inherit God’s kingdom, neither can corruption inherit incorruption.” God’s kingdom, or the realm where he exercises his sovereign will through his Son, is heavenly. “Flesh and blood,” though essential for life on earth, are unsuitable for a heavenly existence.

Whatever is corruptible or perishable in nature cannot be part of an imperishable realm. (15:50)

Upon Christ's return as king and judge, believers then alive will be changed in order to be with him. This aspect had been an undisclosed divine "mystery" for centuries, but was revealed after Jesus Christ came to the earth. Commenting on the "mystery," the apostle explained, "We shall not all fall asleep [in death], but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the blink of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." In his first letter to the Thessalonians (4:15-17), Paul indicated that the "dead in Christ" would be resurrected first and afterward believers who were then alive would join the Lord. At the divinely designated time (represented as being announced by a trumpet blast), this would take place. The reference to the "last trumpet" suggests that this would herald the last event for believers on earth. Just as the resurrection of the Son of God occurred suddenly, the change living believers would experience from the mortal to the immortal state is described as taking place quickly ("in a moment, in the blink of an eye"). (15:51, 52)

For their new life (whether by change or through the resurrection), believers must be in possession of incorruption and deathlessness. Therefore, Paul said that it was necessary for "the corruptible to put on incorruption and the mortal to put on immortality." (15:53) With the corruptible replacing the incorruptible and the immortal the mortal, death will have been defeated. The words of Isaiah 25:8 will then be fulfilled, "Death has been swallowed up in victory." (15:54; see the Notes section.)

Paul followed the quotation of Isaiah with one from Hosea 13:14, "Where, O death, [is] your victory? Where, O death, [is] your sting?" The swallowing up of death signifies defeat, not triumph. Also the sting that brings about death would be rendered ineffective. (15:55; see the Notes section.)

The apostle identified "sin" as being the "sting of death," for sin brings about the condemnation that leads to death. He referred to the law as the "power of sin," for the law clearly set forth what constituted sin. In identifying individuals as having sinned or missed the mark of moral rectitude in attitude, word, or action, the law declared them to be subject to sin and under condemnation. (15:56)

With the law providing no help in the victory over death but proving to be the power of sin, revealing those under the law to be condemned sinners, the triumph over death had to come from another source. Gratefully, the apostle

exclaimed, “But thanks [be] to God for giving us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!” In expression of his deep love for humankind, God gave his unique Son as the means for liberation from sin and death. The Son of God died sacrificially, taking upon himself the consequences of human sin—past, present, and future. Through faith in him and his sacrificial death, believers are freed from condemnation and their resurrection is assured, with the resultant defeat of death. (15:57)

Paul urged his “beloved brothers” or fellow believers in Corinth to become “steadfast” and “immovable, always abounding in the Lord’s work, knowing that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.” Particularly in their faith regarding the resurrection, they needed to be firm and unwavering. The surety of the resurrection hope should have motivated them to be diligent in advancing the cause of the Lord Jesus Christ. With their resurrection being assured, they would know that their labours would not be in vain. Neither God nor Christ would forget their rightly motivated service, and so their future reward was certain. (15:58; compare Hebrews 6:10.)

### **Notes:**

The apostle did not indicate how he had received the message that he proclaimed. (15:3) In his letter to the Galatians (1:11, 12), he identified the source as having been direct revelation from Jesus Christ.

In 1 Corinthians 15:5, some later copyists changed “twelve” to “eleven” to correct what they seemingly perceived to be an error.

Paul’s words (in 15:15) indicate that he took very seriously any misrepresentation of God’s activity. Attributing to God what is definitely not his work would make one guilty of spreading false testimony about him.

In 1 Corinthians 15:23, the apostle’s focus was on the resurrection as it related to fellow believers in Corinth. For this apparent reason, he may have chosen to mention only those who are “of Christ” or who belong to him. Paul’s comments (in Acts 24:15) about a resurrection of “both the righteous and the unrighteous” indicate that he did not intend to limit the resurrection to the dead in Christ. Moreover, for “each one” to be made alive in his own order would require that others besides the dead belonging to Christ be resurrected.

The Greek word for “order” (*táγμα*) can also designate a “class” or “group,” and the term for “end” (*télos*) in verse 24 may signify “conclusion,” “goal,” “outcome,” “rest,” or “remainder.” This is the basis for the view that Paul actually mentioned three groups: (1) Christ the firstfruits, (2) those who belong

to Christ, and (3) the “rest” [*télos*] when the last enemy death is destroyed. Footnotes in the *New Revised Standard Version* and the German *Neue Genfer Übersetzung* include “rest” as an alternate rendering, but the reading “end” in the main text is the widely accepted preferred significance.

If the word *télos* (in 15:24) denotes “outcome” or “goal,” the meaning would be that the goal is for Christ to hand over the kingdom to his God and Father after having reduced all enemies to nothingness. The German *Neue Genfer Übersetzung* renders the verse according to this meaning. *Und dann wird Christus die Herrschaft Gott, dem Vater, übergeben — dann, wenn er allen gottfeindlichen Mächten, Kräften und Gewalten ein Ende bereitet hat; dann ist das Ziel erreicht.* (And then Christ will hand over the rulership to God, the Father — then, when he had made an end to all dominions, powers and authorities hostile to God, then is the goal attained.)

Another way in which the questions in 15:29 can be punctuated is, “What will those do who are baptized for the dead, if the dead are not raised at all? Why are they also baptized for them?”

The oldest extant manuscript (P46) omits the word “brothers” in 1 Corinthians 15:31, as do a number of later manuscripts.

The words of 15:32 (“Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die”) are identical to the extant Septuagint reading of Isaiah 22:13.

Similarly, the Book of Wisdom (thought to have been written in the first century BCE), represents the faithless wicked ones as reasoning among themselves: “Brief and troublous is our lifetime; neither is there any remedy for man’s dying, nor is anyone known to have come back from the nether world. For haphazard were we born, and hereafter we shall be as though we had not been; because the breath in our nostrils is a smoke and reason is a spark at the beating of our hearts, and when this is quenched, our body will be ashes and our spirit will be poured abroad like unresisting air. Even our name will be forgotten in time, and no one will recall our deeds. So our life will pass away like the traces of a cloud, and will be dispersed like a mist pursued by the sun’s rays and overpowered by its heat. For our lifetime is the passing of a shadow; and our dying cannot be deferred because it is fixed with a seal; and no one returns. Come, therefore, let us enjoy the good things that are real, and use the freshness of creation avidly. Let us have our fill of costly wine and perfumes, and let no springtime blossom pass us by; let us crown ourselves with rosebuds ere they wither. Let no meadow be free from our wantonness; everywhere let us leave tokens of our rejoicing, for this our portion is, and this our lot.” (Wisdom 2:1-9, NAB)

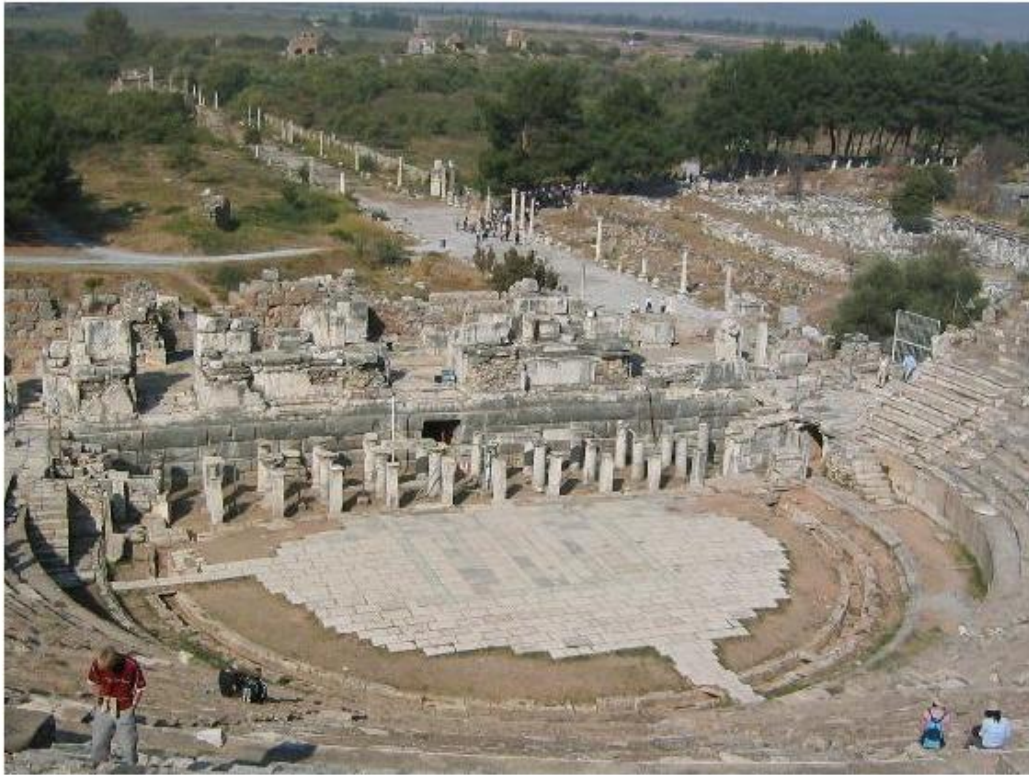
The wording of the quotation (in 15:45) is not the same as in Genesis 2:7, but the thought is preserved.

In 1 Corinthians 15:47, the oldest extant manuscript (P46 from about 200 CE) identifies the second man as “spiritual,” whereas numerous other later manuscripts add “the Lord” as the identifier.

The oldest extant manuscript (P46) and a number of later manuscripts contain an abbreviated reading for 1 Corinthians 15:54, omitting the words about the corruptible putting on incorruption.

The quotation from Isaiah 25:8 (in 15:54) conveys the thought of the text, but the wording is not the same as that of the extant text of the Septuagint, the Masoretic Text, or the Dead Sea Scroll of Isaiah. According to the Septuagint, “prevailing death swallowed up,” but no object for the swallowing is included. The Dead Sea Scroll of Isaiah and other Hebrew manuscripts indicate that God has swallowed up death forever. Other Hebrew manuscripts may be rendered, “And he will swallow up death forever.”

In the case of the quotation from Hosea 13:14 (in 15:55), the extant Hebrew text does not convey the same meaning. It reads, “I [YHWH] will be your stings, death. I will be your cutting off, Sheol.” The extant Septuagint text is closer to the way Paul framed the questions. “Where [is] your vengeance, death? Where [is] your sting, Hades?” In 1 Corinthians 15:55, the word “death” appears instead of “Hades,” although a number of manuscripts (apparently through scribal conformity to the Septuagint) do say “Hades.” Instead of “vengeance,” “right,” “justice,” or “penalty” (*dike*), the Corinthians passage reads “victory” (*nikē*). Additionally, the word order is different, but there are numerous manuscripts that reflect scribal assimilation to the Septuagint text. Whereas the wording of the Hebrew text and the Septuagint differ from Paul’s quotation, all agree in pointing to a marvellous liberation.



*Ephesus viewed from the top of the theatre, towards the harbour. Paul reminded the Corinthians of the opposition he met in Ephesus.*

## **1 Corinthians 16:1-24**

### **16:1-4. The doctrine of stewardship**

#### **Verses 1-2a. The principles involved**

The contribution for the “holy ones” was intended for the poor Jewish believers in Jerusalem. In part, their poverty had resulted from the intense persecution to which they had repeatedly been subjected. (Compare Hebrews 10:32-34.) Regarding the contribution, Paul gave the same instructions to the Corinthians as he had to the congregations in the Roman province of Galatia, the boundaries of which were located in present-day Turkey. (16:1)

#### **Verses 2b – 4. The reason and application**

In keeping with their having prospered materially, Paul wanted them to set aside funds on the first day of the week for this contribution. Then, whenever he



would again be in Corinth, the funds would be available, with no need to take a collection during his visit. (16:2)

Paul exercised great care to assure that believers who contributed to the relief effort could be confident that those in need would receive aid. Upon his arrival in Corinth, he planned to entrust the contribution to those whom the Corinthians approved with letters and to send them to the believers in Jerusalem. If it proved to be appropriate for him also to go there, the designated Corinthian representatives would accompany him. (16:3, 4)



*The track over which ships were hauled across the isthmus before the Corinth Canal was constructed*

## **16:5-24 The illustration of brotherly service**

### **Verse 5-14; Brotherly concern**

Before his coming to Corinth in the province of Achaia, Paul intended to pass through Macedonia. (16:5) While in this province on the northern border of Achaia, he would be visiting communities of believers. (Compare 2 Corinthians 9:1-4.)

Paul had no specific plans about his future stay in Corinth. There was a possibility he would remain in the city for an extended period or even spend the winter there. Afterward he would have the Corinthians “send” him on his way



(likely meaning equipped for the trip) to the next location. The apostle's words ("wherever I may go") indicate that he did not then know where he would be heading immediately after his stay in Corinth. (16:6)

Not wanting his visit with the Corinthians to be too brief, he opted not to see them just when passing through the area but hoped to spend some time with them. Paul recognized that his personal plans were conditional, adding, "if the Lord permits." As an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, he was sensitive to his leading and providential direction. (16:7)

Until Pentecost in the month of Sivan (mid-May to mid-June), Paul had decided to remain in Ephesus, a city on the coast of the Roman province of Asia in what is today part of western Turkey. (16:8) This was because "a large door" for activity in Christ's cause had opened up to him, but there were "many adversaries." According to the book of Acts (19:8-10, 24-27), opposition came from Jews who persisted in unbelief and from devotees of the goddess Artemis. (16:9; see the Notes section.)

Earlier in this letter, Paul had mentioned that he would be sending Timothy (4:17), and here again he referred to his fellow worker's coming. According to Acts 19:22, the apostle sent Timothy and Erastus to Macedonia, where they visited congregations. This indicates that Paul planned for Timothy to arrive in Corinth after completing his mission in Macedonia and after the Corinthians had received the letter. (16:10)

The apostle appears to have been very concerned about the kind of reception the congregation would give to his fellow worker. Timothy was young, and so likely would not have been regarded with the same respect as an older man. Considering that among the Corinthians certain ones even spoke disparagingly of him, Paul had good reason to be apprehensive about what Timothy might face, especially from the arrogant proponents of false teaching. The apostle admonished the Corinthians to accept Timothy in a manner that would not cause him to become fearful (as would have been the case if they resisted his efforts to assist them, showed disregard for him on account of his youth, and proved to be argumentative). They were to keep in mind that he, like Paul, was doing the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. This called for them to treat Timothy kindly as one who labored in advancing the interests of God's beloved Son. (16:10)

Paul urged the Corinthians not to look down on Timothy or to treat him as nothing. This implied that they should appreciate him as a brother in Christ and accord him love and respect. (16:11)

For the Corinthians to “send” Timothy on his way “in peace” could have meant for them to do so in a kindly manner, with their blessing, and supplied with necessities for the trip. Timothy would be traveling to rejoin Paul, who would be waiting for him. The reference to “brothers” could either apply to the ones with Timothy or to those with the apostle. Both meanings are found in translations. (16:11) “I am expecting him to come to me here with the other Christian brothers.” (J. B. Phillips) “I am looking for him to return to me together with the other followers.” (CEV) “I am waiting for him with our friends.” (REB) “The brothers and I are waiting for him.” (NJB)

Paul had strongly urged Apollos to accompany the “brothers,” probably meaning Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus, on their trip back to Corinth. Apollos, though, did not want to visit the congregation then but intended to do so when he had an opportunity at another time. (16:12; see the Notes section.)

Serious problems had developed in the community of believers at Corinth, making Paul’s concluding exhortation most appropriate. The Corinthians needed to be awake, watchful, or vigilant to remain loyal to God and Christ, not deviating from a life of uprightness. It was essential for them to stand firm in the faith (their faith in Christ), resisting faithless persons like those who denied the resurrection hope. For the Corinthians “to be manly” would have meant for them to conduct themselves as mature persons with courage and strong conviction for what is right, not yielding to harmful influences. They needed to become strong as spiritual persons, not allowing impressive personalities, eloquent speech, or plausible arguments to sway them from the glad tidings about Christ. (16:13)

Nothing was to be exempt from the requirement for them to act “in love.” (16:14) For the Corinthians, this would have included rejecting the factious spirit that had developed among them, showing kindly consideration for the limitations of others by not insisting on personal rights, making use of the spiritual gifts for the upbuilding of all, and ending the abuses that had arisen in connection with the observance of the Lord’s supper.

### **Verses 15-24 Service and final salutation**

To his Corinthian “brothers,” Paul spoke commendably about the household of Stephanas. The believers in Corinth knew the members of this household very well, for they were the “firstfruits of Achaia,” or the first ones in the province of Achaia to have accepted the good news about Christ. Understandably, therefore, they were among the few whom the apostle had personally baptized. (1:16; 16:15)

Of their own accord and not on the basis of anyone else's appointment, Stephanas and those of his household took upon themselves the "ministry to the holy ones." They must have busied themselves in serving fellow believers, selflessly expending themselves in rendering whatever spiritual or material aid they could in response to needs. (16:15)

The apostle admonished the Corinthians to submit to or to be supportive of persons like the members of the household of Stephanas and then added, "and to everyone working together and laboring." (16:16) The others may have been individuals who worked and toiled with persons like those of the household of Stephanas. A number of translations make this significance explicit. "I urge you to put yourselves at the service of such people, and of everyone who works and toils with them." (NRSV) "Be subordinate to such people and to everyone who works and toils with them." (NAB) "Follow the leading of people like these and anyone else who works and serves with them." (NCV) "I ask you in turn to put yourselves at the service of people like this and all that work with them in this arduous task." (NJB)

The Greek text, however, does not include a pronoun denoting "them." For this reason, the renderings of other translations reflect a more general significance. "I urge you to accept the leadership of people like them, of anyone who labours hard at our common task." (REB) "I ask you to obey leaders like them and to do the same for all others who work hard with you." (CEV)

The presence of Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus had proved to be a source of joy to Paul. These Corinthian brothers had made up for his being away from the rest of the congregation. (16:17) Doubtless because of the faith and love these men manifested, the apostle could say that they had refreshed his spirit. Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus must have represented the best of the community of believers in Corinth, with their presence having an uplifting effect on Paul's whole being. In view of their having raised his spirits, he spoke of them positively as also having refreshed the spirit of the Corinthians. Persons like these brothers deserved to be given recognition or to be highly valued and appreciated for their service to fellow believers. (16:18)

Paul extended the greetings of the congregations in the Roman province of Asia (in the western part of present-day Turkey). Aquila and Prisca (Priscilla, according to other manuscripts) were then in Ephesus with Paul. (16:8; compare Acts 18:18, 19, 24-26; 19:1.) As this couple had previously resided in Corinth (Acts 18:1, 2), they were known to the Corinthians. Aquila, Prisca, and the group of believers who met in their home for fellowship sent many greetings in

the Lord, or as persons who were at one with the Lord Jesus Christ as members of his body. (16:19)

After telling the Corinthians that “all the brothers” greeted them, Paul continued, “Greet one another with a holy kiss.” This would have been a kiss that reflected their relationship as beloved fellow children of God. (16:20)

Paul customarily dictated his letters. To indicate that this letter was indeed from him, he wrote the greeting with “his own hand.” (16:21)

Affection for the Lord Jesus Christ is revealed by the love believers have for one another. To treat a fellow child of God in a loveless manner is a grave sin. It may be because certain ones among the Corinthians had seriously failed in showing love that the apostle included the strong expression, “If anyone does not love the Lord, let him be anathema [accursed].” (16:22)

Devoted disciples of God’s Son yearn for his return and their being united with him. This thought would be conveyed when the Semitic expression in Paul’s letter is transliterated as *Marana tha* (“O Lord, come).” When, however, the expression is understood to be *Maran atha*, it would be a declaration of faith, “Our Lord has come.” (16:22)

Paul concluded his letter with a prayerful expression and the assurance of his own love. “The favour of the Lord Jesus [Christ, included in other manuscripts] [be] with you. My love [be] with all of you in Christ Jesus. [Amen (So be it) in numerous manuscripts].” The “favour,” grace, or unmerited or unearned kindness would include all the aid and guidance the Son of God gives to his disciples. Although numerous problems had arisen in Corinth and much needed to be corrected, the apostle did not weaken in his love for the community of believers there. He loved all who were “in Christ,” fellow members of his body and children of God. (16:23, 24)

### **Notes:**

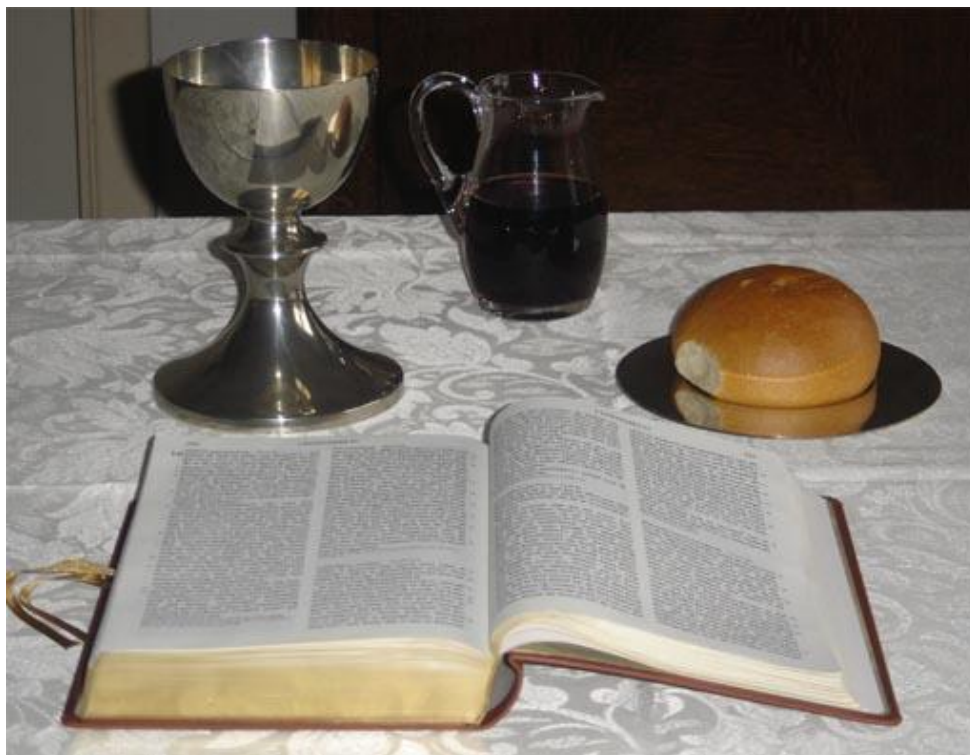
The reference to “adversaries” (in 16:9) does not include the incident involving the silversmith Demetrius. Paul had sent Timothy and Erastus to Macedonia before Demetrius stirred up his fellow silversmiths against Paul as a threat to their profitable trade in fashioning silver shrines of Artemis, precipitating a riot in the theater of Ephesus. (Acts 19:22-40)

The letter does not disclose why Apollos refused to act on the apostle’s entreaty to go to Corinth. (16:12) Paul respected his fellow worker’s decision to visit the congregation at his own discretion. The apostle’s example contrasts sharply with

that of many in positions of power within various religious movements. Although having no divinely granted apostolic authority as did Paul, they think nothing of exercising control and issuing commands in matters of this nature.

In the Greek text, the word “will” (16:12) is not preceded by the pronoun “his.” The inclusion of this pronoun would have made the application to the will of Apollos very specific. Its absence has caused some to conclude that it may have been God’s will or the Lord’s will for Apollos not to visit the Corinthian congregation at that time. It is, however, very unlikely for Paul not to have identified the will as being that of God or that of the Lord Jesus Christ if this had been his intended meaning, and nothing in the context implies such a significance.

After verse 24, numerous manuscripts include a subscription indicating that the letter is for the Corinthians. There are also manuscripts that mention that the letter was written from Ephesus, whereas others say that it was written from Philippi (which the internal evidence does not support as the location).



*The celebrant of the Lord's Supper says:*

In the beginning, O Lord, you created us for yourself. But even though we have fallen through our disobedience to sin and death, you in your infinite mercy, grace, and love sent your only begotten Son our Saviour Jesus Christ, to live among us as a man, born of a virgin. He suffered every hardship and adversity,

every trial, trouble, tribulation, and temptation that we face—except without sin. Finally, He stretched out His arms upon the cross in perfect obedience to your will and offered Himself as a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world.

On the night on which our Lord Jesus was given over to suffering and death through the betrayal of a friend, He took bread, and after He had blessed it and given thanks to you for it, O Lord, He gave it to His disciples and said, **“Take, eat, this is my Body, which is given for you.”** After the supper, he took the cup, and after He had blessed it and given thanks to you for it, O Lord, He said, **“Drink of this, all of you. This is my Blood of the new covenant, which is shed for the remission of your sins and the sins of the whole world.”**

Therefore, as often as we eat this bread and drink of this cup, we eat the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. We proclaim His death until He comes again. Let us proclaim the mystery of our faith:

**Christ has died.**

**Christ is risen.**

**Christ is coming again!**

*The celebrant continues:*

Lord Holy Spirit, you are the giver of life in whom we live and move and have our being; consecrate this bread and wine to be, for us, the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ and consecrate us, O Lord, to partake of this holy meal. *(Additional wording can go here.)* All this we ask, Lord Holy Spirit, in the name of Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you, in the glory of His Father, Amen. Therefore we pray the prayer our Lord taught us, saying:

### **The Lord’s Prayer**

For the full Lord’s Supper Liturgy (Holy Eucharist):

<https://www.scribd.com/doc/19706747/Ecumenical-Eucharist-Liturgies-in-Dutch-French-and-English>

# **1 CORINTHIANS TEST**

## **THE FIRST EPISTLE OF PAUL THE APOSTLE TO THE CORINTHIANS**

### **CHAPTER 1-16**

Now that we have completed our study of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, let us test what we have learned. This is a 16 question (1 for each chapter) multiple choice test. There may be more than one answer for a question. You'll find the answers at the bottom of the page.

1.) Who has God called in this world to confound the wise?

- A. The mighty
- B. Those who are educated
- C. The foolish
- D. The weak

2.) Why have we received the spirit which is of God?

- A. So we can know all things
- B. So we might know the things that are freely given to us from God
- C. So we can be happy all the time
- D. So we will never sin again

3.) What would you say is the main point that Paul is trying to convey to the Corinthians at the beginning of his letter?

- A. The Corinthians were divided, and Paul was encouraging them to be unified
- B. That Jesus didn't send Paul to baptize them
- C. Don't be lazy
- D. If you're foolish, you're okay in God's eyes

4.) Which of these statements are true?

- A. Some people are better than others
- B. The most important thing for a steward of the Lord is faith
- C. It's good to judge yourself, but nobody else
- D. Some gifts come from God, but some things we develop on our own

5.) Why did Paul advise the Corinthians to cast out fornicators from their congregation?

- A. Because in the body of Christ (in the church), all are united, or as one. Letting a fornicator remain, is accepting that behavior, so God will have to deal with everybody
- B. When a person is cast out from the congregation, they are away from God, and alone with the enemy, which makes a person want to seek forgiveness and get back into God's good graces
- C. A little leaven, leavens the whole lump. The whole congregation stands in danger of becoming fornicators
- D. All of the above

6.) When there are conflicts within the church, who should settle these disputes?

- A. The pastor



- B. The eldest
- C. Everyone
- D. Those who are least esteemed in the church should judge them

7.) Which of these statements is true?

- A. An unbelieving husband and children can be saved by a believing wife
- B. God honors all marriage licenses
- C. In general, married people tend to be concerned more about worldly things than God.
- D. Paul thinks divorce is better than marriage

8.) It's not a sin to eat meat offered to idols

- A. If you believe it's a sin
- B. If you believe in idols
- C. If you didn't know it was offered to idols
- D. If you tempt another person by doing so

9.) Paul

- A. was under the law
- B. was without law
- C. was weak
- D. became all of these to gain them for Christ

10.) Which of these statements are true?

- A. God causes all things to happen
- B. God won't allow you to be tempted more than you can handle
- C. Those who are strong are never affected by temptation
- D. The children of Israel were tempted and punished in the wilderness to be examples to us.

11.) You should cover your head

- A. If you're a woman, during prayer or prophesying
- B. If you're a man, during prayer or prophesying
- C. By wearing your hair long if you're a woman
- D. If you believe you should, but in the churches of God, there is no such custom

12.) Spiritual gifts are

- A. Bestowed upon you by the Holy Spirit
- B. Different in different people, but they all work together, unitedly
- C. One just as important as another
- D. All of the above

13.) Love

- A. Contains different qualities that should be modified for different situations
- B. Enhances your other spiritual gifts
- C. Never fails

D. Is second to faith and hope

14.) Speaking in tongues

A. Is the Holy Spirit, speaking to another person, through you, in the other persons language

B. Happens when you want it to

C. Is better than prophecy

D. Is necessary for salvation

15.) Which of these statements are true?

A. Jesus is the only person who will ever be resurrected

B. We will be raised at the last seal

C. When you're resurrected, you will change from mortal to immortal

D. Following the law is more important than believing in the resurrection

16.) Paul

A. Was embarrassed to ask for money

B. Was considerate about his manner of collecting money

C. Needed money for his trip to Jerusalem

D. Advised the Corinthians each to contribute ten percent of their earnings to the saints in Jerusalem because of the worldwide dearth.

## **1 CORINTHIANS TEST ANSWERS**

1. C&D
2. B
3. A
4. B
5. D
6. D
7. A&C
8. C&D
9. A, B, C, &D
10. B&D
11. D
12. D
13. B&C
14. A
15. C
16. B



*Macedonia from which Paul probably wrote 2 Corinthians*

## **2 Corinthians 1:1-24**

### **1:11-11. Divine comfort and its purpose**

#### **Verses 1-7. God's comfort abounding in times of trouble**

This letter starts much like 1 Corinthians. The sender identifies himself as “Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus through God’s will.” It was Jesus Christ who chose him to be an apostle or “one sent forth,” commissioning him to proclaim the good news. His being chosen for this purpose accorded with God’s will, indicating that, ultimately, his authority as an apostle came from the Father and was an expression of his unearned favour. (1:1)

Paul associated Timothy with himself, for the Corinthians knew his young fellow worker well. In referring to him as “the brother” (1:1), the apostle may have expressed his high regard for him as “the brother” without equal. (Compare Philippians 2:19-22.) As Sothenes is likewise called “the brother” (in 1 Corinthians 1:1), the definite article “the” does not necessarily imply this significance.

Paul identified the community of believers in Corinth as the “congregation of God.” It belonged to God because of having been purchased with the blood of his unique Son. (Compare Acts 20:28.) The Corinthian believers were not the only ones to whom the letter was addressed, for the apostle included “all the holy ones” residing in Achaia. (1:1) Among these “holy ones” or God’s cleansed

people by reason of their faith in Christ were believers in Athens and Cenchreae. (Acts 17:34; Romans 16:1)

“Favour,” unmerited or unearned kindness, or grace would include all the help and guidance the Father and his Son would provide. For believers to enjoy the peace of which God and Christ are the source would mean their being in possession of inner tranquillity. Their sense of well-being and security would stem from knowing that as beloved children of God and brothers of Christ they would be sustained and strengthened in times of trial and affliction. (1:2)

No verb follows the adjective “blessed,” and so the meaning can be either “blessed is” or “blessed be.” When (as appears likely) Paul’s words are regarded as an expression of praise for what God had done for him, the preferred rendering would be, “blessed is.” (Compare 2 Corinthians 11:31.) The word *kaí* basically means “and,” which would signify that the one being blessed or praised is “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1:3)

A number of translations do not have the apostle refer to the Father as the “God” of Jesus Christ, either rendering the words according to another possible meaning for *kaí* or leaving the conjunction untranslated. “Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (KJV) “Thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (J. B. Phillips) “Praise God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!” (CEV) Ephesians 1:17, however, is very specific in referring to “the God of our Lord Jesus Christ,” and so there is sound reason for rendering *kaí* as “and” in 2 Corinthians 1:3. (See the Notes section.)

The first person plural “we” may refer to Paul in an editorial sense, apply to him and his fellow workers, or include the apostle and believers throughout Achaia. He spoke of God as the one “who comforts us in all our distress.” Whatever tribulation, oppression, or affliction believers might face, they could be certain that the heavenly Father would console them, either by strengthening them to endure or by delivering them from the difficult circumstances. It would then be possible for them to console others in whatever type of distress they might be experiencing or may yet face. All who have shared in the comfort God gives can impart this comfort to other afflicted ones, sharing with them what the heavenly Father has done for them and thus encouraging those in distress that they, too, will be sustained and strengthened. (1:4)

Paul, his close associates, and other believers suffered much. It was no exaggeration on his part to say that sufferings “abounded” or overflowed. “For just as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so also, through Christ, our comfort abounds.” (1:5)

Believers are members of Christ's body and are at one with him as their head, and so their sufferings are his sufferings. He considers their distress as his own. (Compare Matthew 25:44, 45.) Although their sufferings may overflow, the comfort they receive through him would also be abundant. Nothing would be lacking in the aid they would receive through Christ. They would be sustained in their affliction and granted the needed strength to endure, and so his help and that of his Father would prove to be abundant consolation. (1:5)

The distress Paul and his close associates experienced was for the "comfort and salvation" of the believers to whom he sent his letter. Because of what he personally had been able to endure with divine aid, he was in a position to console fellow believers who faced difficult circumstances. When seeing how Paul had been sustained and strengthened, they would be encouraged to look with confidence to the aid that would come to them through Christ. This would contribute to their course of faithful endurance, with salvation as the ultimate result. The attainment of final salvation would mean that they would be completely freed from sin and united with Christ as sinless sons of God. (1:6)

Members of Christ's body, like the parts of the physical body, share in the suffering and comfort of fellow believers. (Compare 1 Corinthians 12:26; Hebrews 10:32-34.) So, when Paul and his close associates were comforted, the Corinthians and other believers in Achaia would be comforted upon witnessing the evidence of what God and Christ had done in strengthening their brothers. Then, when those to whom Paul wrote experienced the sufferings he and others did and endured patiently with unwavering faith in God and Christ, they would come to be recipients of the same comfort. (1:6)

In his hope that believers in Achaia would faithfully endure distress, Paul was sure or unwavering. He knew or was certain that just as they were "sharers of the sufferings," they would also be participants in "the comfort." Paul did not doubt that God and Christ would come to the aid of believers in their time of distress, providing them with the consolation they needed to bear up patiently. (1:7)

### **Verses 8-11. Thanksgiving for recent deliverance**

The apostle wanted his "brothers" or fellow believers in Corinth and elsewhere in Achaia to know (literally, "not to be ignorant") about the distress that had befallen him in the Roman province of Asia (in what is today the western part of Turkey). He spoke of the incident in the first person plural and so could have meant that Timothy and possibly others faced the same distress. On the other hand, his words may be understood as applying only to himself (as an editorial

“we”). Excessively burdened beyond his strength by the distressing development, Paul felt that his life would end. (1:8)

Within himself he sensed that he had received a death sentence. Through this experience, he had impressed on him that he could not trust in himself or rely on his own strength to endure. His only option was to trust in God who “raises the dead.” (1:9)

So imminent did his own death appear to be that his deliverance from the threatening situation was comparable to a resurrection. According to numerous manuscripts, he said that God had rescued him from “so great a death” (so great a mortal peril) and would continue to do so. In expression of his unwavering confidence, Paul, with reference to God, added, “in whom we have hoped that he will yet rescue us [again].” (1:10)

With their supplications, believers in Achaia could “work with” or assist Paul (and also his close associates) in the hardships he (or he and they) faced. The apostle did not doubt that the intense prayer for him (or for him and his close associates) would receive a favourable response. As a consequence of the divine aid he (or he and his fellow workers) would graciously be granted, many would give thanks to God. (1:11)

### **1:12-2:13 Testimony of sincerity**

#### **Verses 1:12-24 Paul’s reason for joy**

For Paul, his “boasting,” or the basis for a proper pride, was the manner in which he had conducted himself in the world or the human sphere of life, but particularly toward the Corinthians and others in Achaia. His conscience testified to his having acted in “sincerity” (*haplotes*) and “godly purity” or “godly honesty” (literally, “purity [*eilikrineia*] of God”). He had shunned “fleshly wisdom,” the kind of wisdom that depended on eloquence and impressive bearing to persuade others, but relied fully on God’s favour, or on all that had been divinely granted to him in expression of unearned kindness. (1:12; see the Notes section.)

The manner in which Paul expressed himself indicates that his detractors called his sincerity and purity of motive into question, claiming that he said one thing but then did another. His next words counter this false claim. “For we are not writing to you things other than you can read or also understand, but which I hope you will understand fully [literally, until the end].” There were no hidden meanings in what the apostle had written. His letter was meant to be taken at face value and to be understood by everyone to whom it had been sent. (1:13)



On account of the problems that had arisen in the congregation at Corinth, it was only in “part” or to “an extent” that the Corinthians understood or recognized that Paul rightly was an object for their boasting. They could properly take pride in him on account of his devoted service for them. Likewise, “in the day of the Lord Jesus,” or at the time of his glorious return as king and judge, the Corinthians would be the object of Paul’s boasting. Confidently, he looked forward to the joy and satisfaction he would experience. His labor for the Corinthians would not have been in vain, for they would then be united with Christ as approved children of God. Paul’s loving assurance respecting them should have caused them to re-evaluate their thinking about him and to take pride in him, not just in part, but to the full extent that he deserved. (1:14; see the Notes section.)

In view of his confidence about the future of the Corinthians in the day of the Lord Jesus Christ, he had previously wanted to come to them. Paul spoke of his planned visitation as being for their “second favour” or, according to other manuscripts, their “second joy.” Possibly he meant that the first favour or joy proved to be when they became believers at the time of his first visit, whereas the second favour or joy would be his future return. The next verse, however, suggests that the reference may be to two future visits. This would mean that the first joy refers to a prospective visit on his way to Macedonia, and the second joy would relate to the future visit upon his return from Macedonia. Paul’s desire had been for the Corinthians to “send” him on his way to Judea (probably meaning to send him equipped for the trip and with their blessing). The purpose of the journey to Judea would have been to take the collection from the various congregations to the poor believers in Jerusalem. (1:15, 16; see the Notes section regarding verse 15.)

Paul, though, did not visit the Corinthians twice as he had intended. His detractors appear to have used this against him, claiming that he could not be trusted. By means of questions, the apostle countered the personal attacks. “So planning this, did I then deal with lightness? Or [with reference to] whatever things I plan, do I plan according to the flesh, so that with me there might be, ‘Yes, yes,’ and ‘No, no’?” These rhetorical questions indicated that he had not been fickle, irresponsible, or vacillating. He had been serious when he determined to visit the Corinthians. The apostle did not plan “according to the flesh,” or with the undependability that is often associated with sinful human nature. When saying “Yes,” he did not at the same time mean “No.” (1:17)

By God’s will, Paul was an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, to impugn the apostle’s trustworthiness would also question God’s reliability as the one who had commissioned him through his Son. Seemingly, for this reason,

Paul focused on God's faithfulness, trustworthiness, or dependability, saying, "But God is faithful." Therefore, the "word" of the one whom God had willed to be an apostle could not be "Yes" and, at the same time, "No." So Paul's "word" to the Corinthians deserved to be trusted. (1:18)

When he first proclaimed the glad tidings about Christ in Corinth, Silas and Timothy labored with him. (Acts 15:40; 16:1-3) The "Son of God, Jesus Christ," the one who was the focus of their proclamation among the Corinthians, "did not become 'Yes and No,' but 'Yes' [is that which] has become in him. For as many as [there are of] God's promises, [they are] 'Yes' in him. Therefore, also through him, the 'Amen' [is said] to God, to [his] glory through us." (1:19, 20)

The Son of God had been revealed to the Corinthians as completely trustworthy. Nothing about Jesus gave even the slightest hint that a "Yes" might actually be a "No." For Paul to have been fickle respecting his word would have been inconsistent with what he had taught the Corinthians about Christ. (1:19)

Through his sacrificial death in faithfulness, the Son of God assured that every one of his Father's promises would be fulfilled, making him the means for a "Yes" to all of them. Rightly, then, prayers are directed to the Father in Jesus' name or in recognition of his exalted position as the Lord who laid down his life and made possible the fulfilment of all of God's promises. Through Christ, the concluding "Amen" (so be it) is expressed. This would be to God's glory, for the "Amen" is said as an expression of loyal submission to his will that Jesus Christ be acknowledged as the highly exalted Lord over all. (Compare Philippians 2:9-11.) The Corinthians had been led to say the "Amen" to God's glory or praise through the preaching of Paul, Silas and Timothy. It would have been completely inconsistent for Paul, who had been instrumental in helping others to give glory to God for his faithfulness, to be untrustworthy as a divinely chosen apostle. (1:20; see the Notes section.)

God is the one who "establishes" (*bebaióo*) believers "in Christ." The Father made it possible for Paul, Silas and Timothy together with the community of believers in Corinth to be established or strengthened in their relationship of oneness with his Son and had anointed them with his spirit, thereby adopting them as his approved sons or children. In view of this joint relationship, Paul could not have been untrustworthy when formulating his plans to visit the Corinthians. (1:21; see the Notes section)

Continuing to comment on what God had done, Paul said, He "also has sealed us and given the deposit [*arrabón*] of the spirit in our hearts." This sealing is with the spirit and identifies the sealed ones as belonging to the Father as his

approved children in his service. The term *arrabón* denotes the “first instalment,” “pledge,” or “down payment.” The expression “deposit of the spirit” identifies the spirit as that “first instalment,” with the genitive noun (“of the spirit”) being used as an appositive. This initial instalment assures that believers will enjoy all the future privileges and blessings they will receive upon coming to have the glorified sinless state of God’s children as their inheritance. In their hearts or their inmost selves, they have an awareness of the presence and operation of the spirit (the deposit), for their lives are being transformed to conform ever closer to the image of their heavenly Father and his Son. (1:22)

With a solemn oath, Paul set forth the reason for his change in plans, “But I call upon God as witness against my soul, [It was] to spare you that I did not yet come to Corinth.” The apostle thus invoked God as his witness against himself if he did not speak the truth. His not having come to Corinth gave the Corinthians time to repent and amend their ways so as to be spared the severe discipline he would have needed to administer if he had arrived earlier. So it was for their benefit that he had not come. (1:23)

Paul had apostolic authority to discipline as with a rod (1 Corinthians 4:21), but he did not claim to be a lord or master over their faith nor were his close associates, Silas and Timothy, such masters. The Corinthians were accountable to the Lord Jesus Christ. As far as their faith was concerned, they were “standing” or grounded in the faith that centered on the Son of God, but they needed to let this faith have greater influence in their lives. They also merited correction that would benefit them. As the divinely appointed apostle, Paul discharged his responsibility to assist them and did so out of deep love for them. Accordingly, he, Silas and Timothy proved to be “fellow workers” for their joy. It would be the joy resulting from conducting themselves as obedient children of God. The corrective admonition directed to the Corinthians was given to promote this joy. (1:24)

### **Notes:**

From verses 3 through 14, Paul used the pronoun “we” or the first person plural verbs. It is not possible to determine whom he may have meant to include or whether he was merely using the editorial “we” with reference to himself. In every case, however, the “we” either included Paul or applied exclusively to him.

The first word of the Greek text (in 1:9) is *allá*, which often denotes a strong contrast and can be rendered “but.” In this context, though, the term serves as an

indicator of emphasis regarding what Paul had experienced and may be rendered “indeed” or “in fact.”

The expression “so great a” (in 1:10) is a rendering of the singular form of the Greek adjective *pelíkos* and precedes the noun meaning “death.” According to the oldest extant Greek manuscript (P46, c. 200 CE), both words are plural and have been understood to mean “such great mortal dangers.”

After the reference to “supplication” (in 1:11), the Greek text is not easy to follow. A literal rendering would be, “that from many faces the [gracious] gift to us, through many thanks might be given for us [you, according to other manuscripts].” The “gift” would be the help or consolation Paul (or Paul and his fellow workers) would receive as a result of the many faces raised to God in prayer. Once it became evident that the prayer of the many had been answered, many would be moved to thank God.

Instead of a form of *haplotes* (in verse 12), denoting “sincerity,” “simplicity,” or “singleness,” many manuscripts, including P46 (c. 200 CE), contain a form of *hagiotes*, meaning “holiness” or “purity.” The noun *eilikrineia* conveys the thought of being free from pretence and is descriptive of honesty and purity in motive.

In their renderings of verse 12, translations vary as to whether the boasting relates to the conscience or to the conduct. “There is one thing we are proud of: our conscience shows us that in our dealings with others, and above all in our dealings with you, our conduct has been governed by a devout and godly sincerity, by the grace of God and not by worldly wisdom.” (REB) “We can be proud of our clear conscience. We have always lived honestly and sincerely, especially when we were with you. And we were guided by God’s wonderful kindness instead of by the wisdom of this world.” (CEV) “Now it is a matter of pride to us—endorsed by our conscience—that our activities in this world, particularly our dealings with you, have been absolutely aboveboard and sincere before God. They have not been marked by any worldly wisdom, but by the grace of God.” (J. B. Phillips) “This is what we are proud of, and I can say it with a clear conscience: In everything we have done in the world, and especially with you, we have had an honest and sincere heart from God. We did this by God’s grace, not by the kind of wisdom the world has.” (NCV) It appears preferable to understand the phrase about the conscience as affirming (“the testimony of our conscience”) the laudable conduct and not as focusing on the good conscience as the object of the boasting.

In verse 14, manuscript readings vary, with many saying “the day of the Lord Jesus” and others including the word “our” (“in the day of our Lord Jesus”).

A number of translations (in verse 14) are explicit in drawing a distinction between what Paul hoped the Corinthians would come to feel about him and his future pride in them at the time of Christ’s return, and this appears to be the preferable significance. “It is my hope that, just as you have already understood us partially, so you will understand fully that you can be as proud of us as we shall be of you when the Day of our Lord Jesus comes.” (NJB) “And I hope that as you have understood some things about us, you may come to know everything about us. Then you can be proud of us, as we will be proud of you on the day our Lord Jesus Christ comes again.” (NCV) “You can be honestly proud of us as we shall be of you on the day when Christ reveals all secrets.” (J. B. Phillips)

Other translations represent the Corinthians as also taking pride in Paul on the day of the Lord. “As you have already understood us in part—that on the day of the Lord Jesus we are your boast even as you are our boast.” (NRSV) “You do understand us in some measure, and I hope you will come to understand fully that you have as much reason to be proud of us, as we of you, on the day of our Lord Jesus.” (REB) “Then when our Lord Jesus returns, you can be as proud of us as we are of you.” (CEV)

The Greek word that basically means “formerly” or “previously” is *próteros*. In verse 15, a number of translations have rendered this term as “first,” and the expressions “second joy” and “second favour” (depending on which manuscript evidence is chosen as the basis for the translation) also have been translated in a variety of ways. Numerous translations make the reference to two future visits explicit, but differences may be noted in the way the words of verse 15 are interpreted. “Since I was sure of this, I wanted to come to you first, so that you might have a double favour.” (NRSV) “It was because I felt so confident about all this that I had intended to come first of all to you and give you the benefit of a double visit.” (REB) “Trusting you, and believing that you trusted us, our original plan was to pay you a visit first, and give you a double ‘treat.’” (J. B. Phillips) “I was so sure of all this that I made plans to visit you first so you could be blessed twice.” (NCV) “I was so sure of your pride in us that I had planned to visit you first of all. In this way you would have the blessing of two visits from me.” (CEV)

Whereas we today cannot be certain about the exact meaning of Paul’s words, they were understood by the recipients of the letter. The words do not have the

same relevance to us, making any uncertainty about their significance immaterial.

In verse 20, the phrase about the “Amen” literally reads, “through him the Amen to God toward glory through us.” The absence of a verb has led translators to interpret the reference to be to the expressions made either by believers or Christ. “For this reason it is through him that we say the ‘Amen,’ to the glory of God.” (NRSV) “Through him can be said the final Amen, to the glory of God.” (J. B. Phillips) “That’s why we have Christ to say ‘Amen’ for us to the glory of God.” (CEV) If Paul had meant Christ as saying the “Amen,” he would surely have been more specific. So there is good reason to regard this interpretive rendering as questionable.

The Greek verb *bebaióo* can mean “establish,” “strengthen,” “confirm,” or “guarantee.” Based on the meaning they have chosen, translators vary in their renderings of verse 21. “But it is God who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us.” (NRSV) “We owe our position in Christ to this God of positive promise: it is he who has consecrated us to this special work.” (J. B. Phillips) “And if you and we belong to Christ, guaranteed as his and anointed, it is all God’s doing.” (REB) “And so God makes it possible for you and us to stand firmly together with Christ. God is also the one who chose us.” (CEV) “Remember, God is the One who makes you and us strong in Christ. God made us his chosen people.” (NCV)



*The site of Ancient Corinth*

## 2 Corinthians 2: 1-17

### 2:1-13. Paul's desire to visit them in joy.

Paul continued to explain why he had not made another visit to Corinth, saying, "For [But, according to other manuscripts] this I had decided, not again in sadness to come to you." (2:1) The Corinthians would have known exactly what the apostle meant, but we today cannot be certain. Paul's words may mean that, besides the initial visit when the community of believers came into existence, he had returned to Corinth. This second visit had occasioned sadness on account of problems that had arisen among the believers, and Paul did not want to repeat such a visit. Numerous translations convey this significance. "So I made up my mind that my next visit to you must not be another painful one." (REB) "I have decided not to make my next visit with you so painful." (CEV) "So I decided that my next visit to you would not be another one to make you sad." (NCV) "And I made up my mind that I would not pay you another painful visit." (J. B. Phillips)

No mention of a painful visit is included in the book of Acts. This would not rule out there having been such a visit, for one should not expect a comparatively short account to include every detail. At the same time, with no confirmatory details in the book of Acts, one cannot be sure whether Paul made a painful visit before or after writing 1 Corinthians.

On the other hand, there are ways in which to understand the apostle's words that would not point to his having made a second visit. Although it would not be following the natural word order, the Greek text could be understood to mean that Paul had decided not to make his next visit one that would bring sadness. Another possibility would be that the apostle had resolved not to return to Corinth while he was saddened about the troublesome developments among the believers.

There is no uncertainty about the fact that Paul wanted to avoid having his coming to Corinth occasion sadness. "For," as he continued, "if I sadden you, then who is the one to cheer me if not the one whom I have saddened?" His visit would have required administering strong discipline, resulting in sadness to the community of believers. So the source of any joy Paul would have experienced would have come from the very ones whom he had saddened. (2:2)

The apostle "wrote" what he did so that he, upon his arrival in Corinth, would not be saddened by those respecting whom he wanted to rejoice. In the phrase "I wrote this very thing," Paul's use of the aorist tense for the Greek verb *grápho*

(rendered as a past tense in English [wrote]), may be understood from the standpoint of the recipients of the letter. Another possibility is that his reference is to a severe letter (either 1 Corinthians or another letter that has not been preserved) he had previously written to them. (Compare 2 Corinthians 7:8; 10:9, 10.) Although the Corinthians had conducted themselves in a manner that left much to be desired, the apostle had confidence they would make the required changes that would bring him joy. His joy would then be a joy in which they would be participants. (2:3)

In a state of distress and anguish, Paul had written to the Corinthians. At “heart” or in his inmost self, he was greatly troubled about the undesirable condition existing among them. While writing, he shed many tears. His objective had not been to sadden them but to let them know the abundant love he had for them. The apostle’s deep concern for the Corinthians had its source in love, as he wanted them to be found approved children of God. (2:4)

Paul next focused on the one who had been the reason for sadness, pain, or distress. “But if anyone has saddened, he has not saddened me, but in part (not to overburden [*epibaréō*]) all of you.” The context is not specific in identifying the person responsible for causing grief. Based on 1 Corinthians 5:1, the reference may be to the incestuous man. The manner in which the apostle expressed himself, however, has given rise to the view that the wrongdoer was one who had caused distress for Paul, possibly by defiantly rejecting his apostolic authority in a direct confrontation with him or with a close associate whom he had sent. (2:5; see the Notes section.)

When saying that the wrongdoer had not saddened him, Paul indicated that he had not acted out of personal interests when directing the Corinthians to take action against the individual. It appears that the apostle regarded himself as part of the community of believers and so represented the greater grief as having affected the Corinthian congregation. The expression “in part” (literally, “from part”) may be variously understood. Three of a number of possible meanings are: (1) The wrongdoer had caused sadness to an extent for the Corinthian believers. (2) He had saddened them but not all of them to the same degree. (3) He had pained many, but not all of the members of the congregation. (2:5)

In the context of what Paul did not want to do, the “overburdening” could relate to doing so with words. This would mean that he did not wish to say too much. The Greek word *epibaréō* has also been understood to mean “exaggerate” or “be too severe.” (2:5) These meanings are reflected in the renderings of modern translations. *Hat aber jemand Betrübnis verursacht, so hat er nicht mich betrübt, sondern zum Teil — damit ich nicht zu viel sage — euch alle.* (Has someone



caused sadness, then he has not saddened me, but in part — that I might not say too much — all of you.) (Schlachter [German]) “If someone among you has brought sorrow, he has not made me as sad as he has all of you. I say this so I may not make it hard for you.” (NLT) “But if anyone has caused pain, he has caused it not to me, but to some extent — not to exaggerate it — to all of you.” (NRSV) “If anyone has caused grief, he has not so much grieved me as he has grieved all of you, to some extent — not to put it too severely.” (NIV) “Any injury that has been done has not been done to me; to some extent (I do not want to make too much of it) it has been done to you all.” (REB) “Someone there among you has caused sadness, not to me, but to all of you. I mean he caused sadness to all in some way. (I do not want to make it sound worse than it really is). (NCV)

Not all of the Corinthians had concurred with the disapproval expressed against the wrongdoer. But Paul felt that the censure of the majority had been sufficient to attain the desired objective. Those who had shown disrespect for the apostle must have been the minority. (2:6)

The man responsible for causing grief had repented, and Paul admonished the Corinthians to forgive and comfort him. Their treating him kindly would prevent his becoming overwhelmed (literally, “swallowed up”) with great sorrow, which could have included his being burdened by feelings of guilt and divine rejection. (2:7)

In order to assure the repentant man that he was again a part of the community of believers, Paul encouraged the Corinthians to confirm their love for him. (2:8) The previous directive the apostle had written about this wrongdoer served to test the Corinthians, making it possible for him “know” or to determine whether they were obedient in everything. This obedience doubtless meant submissive response to everything pertaining to Paul’s rightful exercise of apostolic authority. (2:9)

As far as the apostle was concerned, anything the congregation in Corinth would forgive he would also forgive. Thus he revealed that he regarded himself as a part of the same community of believers. When it came to Paul’s forgiveness of anything, whenever he extended it, he did so for the sake of the Corinthians “in the presence [literally, face] of Christ.” He could speak of acting for their sake because his forgiveness had as its focus the spiritual welfare of the congregation. He extended forgiveness as one who loyally submitted to Christ and so spoke of having forgiven in his presence. (2:10)

A failure to forgive a repentant sinner and to refuse to show love to him would serve the interests of Satan. The repentant individual could be lost to the congregation. Believing himself to be rejected as disapproved and without forgiveness, the person could sink into a state of despair and take up a life like those in a state of alienation from God. In that case, the congregation, through its harshness, would have fallen into Satan's trap, for his designs (as the Corinthians knew) were intended to cause believers to experience spiritual ruin. (2:11)

Commenting on his personal situation, Paul referred to his arrival in Troas (a major seaport on the northwest coast of Asia Minor) for the purpose of declaring the glad tidings of Christ. Even though a door had opened up to him "in the Lord," or the opportunity proved to be favourable for advancing the cause of the Son of God, the apostle found himself in a state of great anxiety. His "spirit" or mind gave him no rest. In Troas, he had expected to meet Titus, whom he had sent to Corinth and from whom he wanted to learn about the response of the Corinthians, but Titus had not arrived. So great was Paul's concern about the Corinthians that he decided to leave Troas and go to Macedonia, apparently hoping to meet Titus who would have followed the land route from Corinth in the province of Achaia northward through the province of Macedonia. (2:12, 13)

## **2:14-17. The glory of the ministry – its triumph**

### **Verse 14. The Christian's march of triumph**

Paul did finally meet Titus somewhere in Macedonia and was greatly comforted upon learning about the favourable response of the congregation in Corinth. (7:5-7) This and probably also other positive developments in the furtherance of Christ's cause moved Paul to thank God. The apostle then likened God's action to a procession that celebrated the triumph of a Roman army. "[He], in Christ, always leads us in triumph [*thriambeúo*] and, through us, makes manifest the fragrance of the knowledge of him in every place." (2:14)

In this context, the Greek verb *thriambeúo* has been understood to mean either "to lead in a triumphal procession" or "to lead in triumph." The ancient Roman triumphal processions included both the captives and the victorious troops. For the captives, the fragrant incense that was burned along the route often portended death, whereas its aroma heralded the future honours to be granted to the triumphant warriors. In view of Paul's expression of thanks to God, it is more likely that he thought of himself as a sharer in the victory and not as Christ's captive in the triumphal procession. If the apostle's use of "we" is to be regarded as a plural (and not as an editorial "we"), he meant also to include his

close associates. Both the apostle and his fellow workers were “in Christ” or at one with him as members of his body. (2:14)

In relation to knowledge, the pronoun “him” could apply either to God or to Christ. (2:14) Both meanings are found in modern translations. “God also helps us spread the knowledge about Christ everywhere, and this knowledge is like the smell of perfume.” (CEV) “Now wherever we go he uses us to tell others about the Lord and to spread the Good News like a sweet perfume.” (NLT) “Thanks be to God who leads us, wherever we are, on his own triumphant way and makes our knowledge of him spread throughout the world like a lovely perfume!” (J. B. Phillips) “But thanks be to God who always gives us in Christ a part in his triumphal procession, and through us is spreading everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of himself.” (NJB)

### **Verses 15-17. The Christian’s powerful influence**

Paul proved to be a vessel containing the vital knowledge about both the Father and his Son. Through the apostle (and also his fellow workers), God spread this knowledge like a fragrant incense. From the standpoint of the message, Paul could speak of himself (and also his close associates) as a being a “fragrance of Christ” to God among those who were being saved and among those who were perishing. The message itself related to Christ and so could be called a “fragrance of Christ.” It was the message God wanted to be spread far and wide in its unadulterated form and, therefore, the bearers of this message were a pleasing fragrance to him. To those who responded in faith, the bearers of the message proved to be like a sweet-smelling incense. Through the messengers, they had learned about how they could be forgiven of their sins and be saved or liberated from condemnation. The messengers were also a fragrance to those who were perishing because of their remaining in a state of condemnation on account of unbelief. (2:15)

The “fragrance of Christ” had the opposite effect on those who were being saved and on those who were perishing. Paul described the aroma as being “from death to death” for those who were perishing and as being “from life to life” for those who were being saved. Unbelievers perceived nothing positive in the message, for it revealed them to be condemned sinners with death in view. Those who believed found it to be a fragrance that had its source in life and led to their being liberated from sin and coming to enjoy a newness of life as God’s approved children. (2:16)

The apostle then raised the question, “And who is fit [*hikanós*] for these things?” In this context, the Greek word *hikanós* could mean “sufficient,” “adequate,”

“fit,” “competent,” or “qualified” and apparently relates to being in a position to function as a “fragrance of Christ.” (2:16) The implied answer could be that Paul was fit for the task by reason of what God and Christ had done for him. On the other hand, from the standpoint of human qualifications or abilities, no one was adequate to serve in this manner, especially in view of the consequences to which acceptance or rejection of the message led.

Contrasting himself (if not also including his associates) with those who were not functioning as a “fragrance of Christ,” Paul continued, “For we are not like the many [the rest, according to many other manuscripts] [who are] hucksters of the word of God, but as out of sincerity, but as from God, we speak before God in Christ.” The apostle was not like a dishonest peddler or huckster, seeking gain by adulterating God’s word or message. In sincerity or with a pure motive, he made known the truth about God and Christ. Paul spoke as a person sent from God and with an awareness of being in his presence. As a member of Christ’s body, he spoke “in Christ” or as a person at one with him. (2:17)

#### **Notes:**

A literal reading of the Greek text of 2:3 would be, “And I wrote this very thing, so that (when I come) I should not have sadness from those over whom I should be rejoicing. I have confidence regarding all of you that my joy is [that] of all of you.” Modern translations have variously rendered the verse in ways that are more explicit than the Greek text. “This is precisely the point I made in my letter: I did not want, I said, to come and be made miserable by the very people who ought to have made me happy; and I had sufficient confidence in you all to know that for me to be happy is for all of you to be happy.” (REB) “I wrote you a letter for this reason: that when I came to you I would not be made sad by the people who should make me happy. I felt sure of all of you, that you would share my joy.” (NCV) “The real purpose of my previous letter was in fact to save myself from being saddened by those whom I might reasonably expect to bring me joy.” (J. B. Phillips)

The explanation that 2 Corinthians 2:5 relates to the incestuous man dates to ancient times. Based on his belief that the man could not have been forgiven, Tertullian (c. 160-c. 221), however, rejected this understanding of Paul’s words. In his discussion “On Modesty,” chapter XIII, he indicated that the apostle had delivered the incestuous fornicator to Satan, “not with a view to emendation, but with a view to perdition.” Regarding the words, “for the *destruction* of the flesh,” he interpreted this to mean the “actual substance through which [the man] had fallen out” of the faith. Concluding that there was no hope for the incestuous man, Tertullian explained the saving of the spirit to mean the saving

of the congregation, for it “must be presented ‘saved,’ that is, untainted by the contagion of impurities in the day of the Lord, by the ejection of the incestuous fornicator.” Whereas the incestuous man had committed grave sin, there is nothing in Paul’s language to suggest that he had gone beyond the point of repentance. According to 1 John 1:7-2:2, genuine repentance leads to forgiveness, and so Tertullian’s view does not rest on a sound basis.

In 2:7, numerous manuscripts include the word *mállon*, meaning “rather.” This would mean that, rather than continuing to censure the repentant man, the Corinthians were to forgive and comfort him.

## **2 Corinthians 3:1-18**

### **3:1-6a. The glory of the ministry – its accreditation**

#### **Verse 1. It is not accredited by self-commendation**

Paul’s mentioning his sincerity or the purity of his motives may have caused some of the Corinthians to reason that he was recommending himself. He countered this implied conclusion with questions. “Are we starting again to recommend ourselves? Or do we like some need letters of recommendation to you or from you?” The Corinthians knew how Paul had conducted himself in their midst, and so there was really no reason for him to recommend himself. As he had labored among them and elsewhere, he needed no letters of introduction, as did believers who were not known in cities to which they intended to travel. (3:1; compare Acts 18:26, 27.)

#### **Verses 2-3. It is accredited by Paul’s witness and work.**

The Corinthians themselves were the fruit of his labors in declaring the glad tidings about Christ. Paul could point to them as his letter of recommendation, identifying him as Christ’s servant. According to numerous manuscripts, the apostle referred to this letter as having been “written in our hearts.” This suggests that he included his fellow workers as having deep love for the Corinthians. They were believers who had a place in their “hearts” or inmost affections. The message the apostle and his close associates proclaimed had resulted in great changes for the better in the lives of the Corinthians. The remarkable transformation would not have escaped the notice of the people among whom they lived. So, as Paul added, the Corinthians were a letter “known and read by all men.” (3:2)

The apostle, however, did not claim the Corinthians believers as his own. They belonged to the Lord Jesus Christ who had sacrificed his life for them and to the

Father who had sent his Son. Appropriately, therefore, Paul referred to them as being manifest as a “letter of Christ.” Their lives revealed what the Son of God had done for them. Pointing to his role (and possibly also that of his fellow workers [if the first person plural is not to be understood in the editorial sense]) respecting this “letter of Christ,” Paul continued, “served [*diakonéo*] by us.” He functioned as one who had ministered to them with deep concern and affection. (3:3) In their renderings of the Greek word *diakonéo*, translators often have been more specific (“entrusted to our care” [NJB]; “administered by us” [NAB]; “prepared by us” [NRSV]; “given to us to deliver” [REB]; “sent through us” [NCV]; “which we ourselves have written” [J. B. Phillips]; “the result of our ministry” [NIV]).

The community of believers in Corinth was not a letter written with ink. It was a letter written with the “spirit of the living God, not on stone tablets but on tablets of fleshly hearts.” Upon accepting Jesus as God’s unique Son and their Lord in response to Paul’s ministering among them, the Corinthians received God’s spirit. The working of the spirit within them transformed their lives. Unlike the Ten Commandments given to the Israelites, which were written on stone tablets, the “writing” of, or the transforming impression by, the spirit of the living God proved to be on “tablets of fleshly hearts.” Whereas stone is hard, flesh is not. So the hearts or the inmost selves of the Corinthians were responsive to the “writing” or the activity of the spirit. (3:3; compare Exodus 34:1; Jeremiah 31:31-33; Ezekiel 36:25-27.)

#### **Verses 4-6. It is accredited by God**

When it came to discharging his commission as an apostle, Paul had confidence “toward God.” This could mean that the apostle felt confident before God in carrying out his ministry. It was “through Christ” and so by reason of what Christ had done for him that the apostle had this assurance. (3:4)

Paul recognized that his being fit, equipped, suited, or qualified to carry out his commission could not be attributed to his personal ability. He gave all the credit to God, saying, “But our fitness [comes] from God, who also made us fit servants of a new covenant, not of the letter, but of the spirit; for the letter kills, but the spirit makes alive.” (3:5, 6)

On the basis of Christ’s sacrificial death, a new covenant came into being. This covenant replaced the Mosaic law covenant and made it possible for those who responded in faith to the message about Christ to be forgiven of their sins. As a minister of the new covenant, Paul made known how individuals could become its beneficiaries. (3:6)

“The letter” relates to the written law given to the Israelites. In the case of the new covenant, there is no written legal code, with prescribed penalties for violation of specific commands. From this standpoint, the new covenant is not of “the letter.” (3:6)

Through the prophet Jeremiah (31:33), God revealed that, in the case of the new covenant, the law would be written on hearts. So the new covenant is “of spirit.” The operation of God’s spirit within believers enables them to conduct themselves according to his ways. The result to them as beneficiaries of the new covenant differed markedly from those who were subject to the law given to the Israelites. The “letter” or the written law “kills,” for it condemns those who fail to live up to it, but the “spirit makes alive.” This is because the spirit brings about a newness of life in the case of those who are forgiven of their sins and enables them to maintain an approved standing before God. Those who are led by the spirit are not under condemnation. They are justified children of God who are destined to enjoy life in the sinless state. (3:6)

### **3: 6b-11. The glory of the ministry – its message of grace**

#### **Verses 6b-11. Its message was spiritual and life-giving**

Paul referred to the law covenant as the “service of death,” for the Israelites were unable to live up to written code and, therefore, came under condemnation, with death in view. The Ten Commandments, which formed part of the law, were engraved on stone tablets. For this reason, the apostle referred to the “service of death” as consisting of “letters incised [on] stones.” (3:7)

This “service of death” came to the Israelites “in glory.” When Moses descended from Mount Sinai with the two tablets on which the Ten Commandments were incised, his face emitted rays. (Exodus 34:29, 30) So the Israelites could not “gaze at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face.” That glory, though, did not last. (3:7)

In view of the glory associated with the “service of death,” should not the “service of the spirit” come in much more glory? And it did. The new covenant provided freedom from condemnation and was far superior to the law covenant. Guided by God’s spirit, the beneficiaries were destined for life. Rightly, the apostle spoke of the new covenant arrangement as the “service of the spirit.” (3:8)

Referring to the law covenant as “the service of condemnation,” Paul continued, “For if the service of condemnation [was in] glory, much more does the service of righteousness abound in glory.” The law covenant unmistakably identified the

Israelites as sinners and so under condemnation, but the new covenant made forgiveness of sins possible. On the basis of faith in Christ and the benefits of his sacrificial death for them, believers are justified. God regards them as righteous and accepts them as his approved children. With reference to results, “the service of righteousness” is far more glorious than “the service of condemnation.” The splendor of “the service of righteousness” does indeed abound. (3:9)

The law covenant arrangement (“the service of death” and “the service of condemnation”) formerly had been glorified or had come in glory. This glory was eclipsed by the surpassing glory of the new covenant arrangement (“the service of the spirit” and “the service of righteousness”). (3:10)

Through the prophet Jeremiah (31:31-33), God had revealed that there would be a new covenant, indicating that the law covenant would not be permanent. Since the law covenant, which was made obsolete, came “through glory,” much more would the new covenant, which remains, be “in glory.” In the results the new covenant effects, its glory or splendour is enduring. (3:11)

### **3:12-18. The glory of the ministry - its transformation power**

#### **Verses 12-17. It is to exercise great boldness**

The sure hope which Paul mentioned relates to the enduring nature of the new covenant and its associated glory or splendour. This meant that all the benefits of the new covenant were permanent. On the basis of the hope linked to the new covenant, Paul added, “We act [with] much assurance.” He carried out his ministry boldly or courageously, not holding back in any respect from declaring the vital message that would mean life for those who responded in faith. (3:12)

The apostle’s course contrasted with that of Moses when he spoke to the Israelites. Moses put a veil on his face to prevent the people from gazing “to the end [of the glory]” that would fade or vanish. According to the Exodus account (34:29-35), Moses would veil his face whenever he spoke to the people, but removed the veil in his communication with YHWH. Paul’s words suggest that, while Moses addressed the people, the rays emitted from his face would fade and then vanish. Then, as a result of communicating with YHWH at other times, Moses’ face would shine again. It appears that Paul’s mention of the passing glory was intended to illustrate that the law covenant also was not permanent. This aspect is what neither the Israelites in the time of Moses nor in the apostle’s own time understood. (3:13)



The mental faculties of the Israelites were “calloused” or impervious to perceiving the transitory nature of the law and its real purpose. To Paul’s own day, the veil remained in the case of the unbelieving Jews when they heard the reading of the words of the law covenant, “for in Christ” the law covenant is set aside. With the validation of the new covenant on the basis of Christ’s sacrifice, the law covenant had served its purpose. The law was designed to make the Israelites fully aware of their sinful state and to prepare them to accept the new covenant arrangement, with Christ as its mediator and his sacrifice as the basis for forgiveness of sins. (3:14)

Whenever the unbelieving Jews heard the law of Moses read to them, a veil continued to cover their minds (literally, “hearts”). This hindered them from understanding the law’s purpose in relation to Christ and to act in harmony with its guidance to put faith in him. (3:15)

Only when there is a turning to “the Lord,” the veil is taken away, making it possible to comprehend the significance and purpose of the law. Jesus Christ is the Lord to whom the unbelieving Jews needed to turn. (3:16) He alone is the one through whom deliverance from sin and condemnation is possible. (Acts 4:12)

Earlier, Paul had contrasted “letter” and “spirit” and indicated that the “spirit makes alive.” (3:6) Here, in verse 17, the apostle said, “Now the Lord is the spirit, and where the spirit of the Lord [is, there is] freedom.” In the life of believers, the “spirit” or the spiritual power is the Lord Jesus Christ. So Paul’s words may be understood to mean that Christ is the energizing or motivating spiritual power. Where that spiritual power is active, freedom exists. Those who turn to Christ cease to be dead in trespasses and sins. They are made alive, forgiven of their transgressions, and discharged from the law and its condemnation. (3:17; compare John 8:31-36; Romans 8:15; Galatians 5:1; Ephesians 2:1.)

### **Verse 18. It is to enjoy wonderful transformation**

As a servant of the new covenant, Paul did not veil his face as did Moses when speaking to the people. “And all of us [with] unveiled face reflect (*katoptrízo*) the Lord’s glory, being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord of spirit.” (3:18)

The Greek word *katoptrízo* is in the middle voice and could be understood to mean “reflect” (like a mirror) or look at (as in a mirror). Both meanings are found in modern translations. “And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the

glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image.” (NRSV) “All of us, gazing with unveiled face on the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image.” (NAB) “And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness.” (NIV) “So our faces are not covered. They show the bright glory of the Lord.” (CEV)

The Son of God is the flawless reflection of his Father’s glory. (John 1:14; Hebrews 1:3) So, for Paul to have meant gazing upon the Lord’s glory with an unveiled face would really not have differed from what Moses did when communicating with YHWH. This would also mean that, as the unveiled face of Moses came to be glorious, so also the transformation in the case of Paul and other believers came about by gazing at the Lord. The emphasis in the context of the letter, however, has been on Paul’s role in discharging his ministry as an apostle. He hid nothing when carrying out his commission as a servant of the new covenant but reflected the glory of the Lord as his faithful imitator. Seemingly, therefore, “reflect the glory of the Lord” is the rendering that fits the context better. (3:18)

As imitators of the Lord Jesus Christ, Paul and other believers continued to be transformed into his image. Being “from glory to glory,” the transformation process did not stop. As the apostle and other servants of the new covenant conformed their lives ever closer to the image of the Lord Jesus Christ, they were transformed from one degree of glory to another degree of glory. When saying “as from the Lord of spirit,” Paul appears to have meant that the Lord Jesus Christ is the source of the spirit or the spiritual power that made the transformation possible. (3:18; see the Notes section.)

### **Notes:**

In verse 2, the oldest extant manuscript (P46, c. 200) and numerous other manuscripts read “our hearts.” Many other manuscripts say “your hearts.”

A misinterpretation of verse 6 contributed to the distortion of the true sense of the Scriptures. Origen (c. 185-c. 254) negated the value of the contextual significance, saying, “By the ‘letter’ [Paul] means that ‘exposition of Scripture which is apparent to the senses, while by the ‘spirit’ that which is the object of the ‘understanding.’” This view gave rise to erroneous teachings and numerous allegorical interpretations that completely obscured the correct understanding of the Scriptures. The Bible translator William Tyndale (c.1494-1536) called attention to the twisting of the apostle’s words. “Is it not great blindness to say ... that the whole Scripture is false in the literal sense, and killeth the soul? To

prove this their pestilent heresy, they abuse the text of Paul, saying, The letter killeth, because that text was become a riddle unto them, and they understood it not, when Paul, by this word ‘letter,’ understood the law given by Moses to condemn all consciences, and to rob them of all righteousness, to compel them unto the promises of mercy that are in Christ.”

Numerous translations render the expression “Lord of spirit” (verse 18) to mean that the Lord is the Spirit (*pneúma* [here in the genitive case]). The context, however, does not require that *pneúma* in the genitive case be represented as an appositive.

## **2 Corinthians 4: 1-18**

### **4:1-7. The glory of the ministry – its sincerity**

#### **Verses 1-2. It renounces all sin and sham**

Despite his initially having been a violent opposer of believers in Christ, Paul became the recipient of divine mercy and, as an apostle, was entrusted with the service or ministry of the new covenant. He highly valued what had been committed to him and the inestimable benefits that would result to those who responded in faith to Christ and became beneficiaries of the new covenant. Therefore, though faced with many trials and pressures, he did not give up or yield to discouragement. (4:1; 1 Timothy 1:12, 13; see the Notes section.)

In discharging his ministry, Paul renounced “the hidden things of shame.” He determined to be free from shameful actions that one would conceal from the view of others. The apostle did not “walk” or conduct himself in a crafty or sly manner nor did he falsify or distort the word of God. He resolved to recommend himself to the conscience of all people when making known the truth about God and Christ. In his personal conduct, he endeavoured to be exemplary. When sharing the “word” or message that had been divinely entrusted to him, he made sure that he did not adulterate it but conveyed it properly as God’s word. Paul spoke and acted with a full awareness of his accountability to God, and so referred to recommending himself “before God” to every human conscience. The apostle avoided everything that might needlessly have occasioned offense. (4:2)

#### **Verses 3-7. It advertises Jesus Christ**

If the evangel proved to be veiled, this could not be attributed to Paul. When referring to the good news about Christ as “our evangel,” the apostle meant the message he (and also his fellow workers) proclaimed. It was only to those who

persisted in unbelief that the evangel was veiled. These unbelievers continued to be under the condemnation resulting from sin and, therefore, were identified as the “perishing” ones. (4:3)

The perishing ones continued to be part of the world subject to the powers of darkness. Satan, “the god of this age” (characterized by alienation from the true God), blinded the minds of the unbelievers, making it impossible for them to see the brilliance of the “evangel of the glory of Christ.” The evangel has Christ as its focus, revealing his glory, magnificence or splendor as the perfect reflection of the “image of God.” As the unique Son, Jesus Christ is the exact likeness of his Father, flawlessly mirroring his love and compassion. The evangel or good news about Jesus Christ shines with a brightness comparable to lightning, but to those whom Satan has blinded this brilliance remains imperceptible. The illumination does not beam forth to them. (4:4)

In no respect did Paul obscure the light of the glad tidings about the Son of God. The apostle did not draw attention to himself nor engage in any form of self-promotion. His close associates likewise introduced no distracting or obscuring elements when declaring the glad tidings about Jesus Christ. “For we do not proclaim ourselves,” Paul said, “but Christ Jesus [as] Lord, and ourselves as your servants for the sake of Jesus [*diá* (for the sake of) followed by ‘Jesus’ in the accusative case].” The apostle faithfully ministered to the Corinthian believers. He fulfilled the role of a servant, doing so out of regard for the Son of God as his Lord. (4:5)

According to other ancient manuscripts (including P46 [c. 200]), the name Jesus is in the genitive case and so the preposition *diá* would commonly be understood to mean “through.” This would signify that, through the agency of Jesus Christ, Paul and his close associates came to fill the role of servants to the Corinthians, laboring in furthering their spiritual welfare. (4:5)

Seemingly drawing on the Genesis account (1:3-5), the apostle referred to God as saying that light should shine “out of darkness.” It appears that Paul regarded this divine declaration as indicating that all forms of darkness should give way to light. In its fallen condition, the world of mankind found itself in a state of darkness, alienated from and at enmity with God. According to the divine purpose, this darkness was to end. With the coming of Jesus Christ to the earth, light entered the world, shining out of, or while surrounded by, the darkness. In Christ’s “face,” or in his person, “the knowledge of the glory of God” became visible in all its brightness. In the case of Paul and other believers, light shone brightly on their hearts, illuminating their inmost selves and making it possible for them to see the magnificence of their heavenly Father as the God of

incomprehensibly great love. Their having truly come to know the Father through the Son made it possible for them to proclaim “the knowledge of the glory of God” to others. (4:6)

This “knowledge of the glory of God” is the precious treasure that had been committed to “clay vessels.” In themselves, humans, like earthenware jars or pots that may break, are frail. Commenting on why this valuable treasure had been given to him (and probably also his close associates), Paul continued, “We have this treasure in clay vessels, that the excelling power might be of God and not of ourselves.” Thus through the weakness of the vessels, God reveals his power in being able to accomplish his purpose to spread the knowledge of his glory. (4:7)

#### **4:8-18. The glory of the ministry – its sufferings**

##### **Verses 8 – 11. It suffers but is spiritually benefited**

In his weak condition as a human, Paul found himself afflicted in every way, but not so constricted as to have no manoeuvrability. He perceived himself as being at a loss, uncertain, or in a confused mental state regarding what he should do, but he had not reached a point of despair nor had he lost all hope. (4:8)

The apostle experienced persecution (beatings, imprisonment, and stoning), but he was not abandoned. His situation was like that of a person who was thrown down or knocked down, but he was not destroyed. (4:9)

On account of the dangers he encountered, Paul spoke of always bearing in his body “the putting to death of Jesus.” The Son of God accounts the suffering of his disciples, who are members of his body, as his own. In the case of the apostle, so grave were the dangers he faced that he could speak of himself as undergoing a dying process (or as if, in own his person, the Lord Jesus Christ was being slain). The situation, though, was not without hope. Jesus Christ lived. So, just as the Son of God regards the suffering of his disciples as his own, so they become sharers in his life. In the case of believers, the life of Jesus is evident in their having the divinely imparted strength to endure distress. (4:10)

“For,” Paul said, “we who live are continually being delivered to death for Jesus’ sake, that also the life of Jesus may be manifest in our mortal flesh.” It was on account of his furthering the interests of the Son of God that Paul found himself in distressing situations that could have led to his death. So he could rightly speak of being “delivered to death for Jesus’ sake.” Paul’s faithful endurance revealed the existence of an inner life in the “mortal flesh,” and this

inner life was the result of his relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ and so made his participation in Christ's life manifest. (4:11)

### **Verses 12-18. It has an inner secret of spiritual stature**

The distress and persecution to which Paul was subjected repeatedly brought him into mortal danger. From this standpoint, death was at work in him, but life was at work in the Corinthian believers. The very ministry that led to Paul's coming into situations that could have spelled his own death brought life to the Corinthians. Their response in faith led to their being forgiven of their sins and liberated from the condemnation of death. No longer dead in trespasses and sins, they came to enjoy a newness of life as beloved children of God. (4:12)

Like the psalmist, the apostle experienced distress and quoted from Psalm 116:10 (115:1, LXX). The words of the quotation are the same as those in the Septuagint. Paul introduced the quotation by commenting on having "the same spirit of faith" as the written words of the psalmist indicated, "I believed [had faith]; therefore I spoke." Continuing with the application, the apostle added, "And we believed; therefore we also speak." The "spirit of faith" could denote the faith that has God's spirit as its source. It is more likely, however, that this relates to having the same impelling or motivating disposition or inclination to believe. When he was greatly afflicted, the psalmist maintained his faith in God and did not hold back from expressing it, realizing that humans were of no help. Likewise, because Paul had faith in God and Christ, he continued to speak, making known the glad tidings about Jesus Christ despite the distress and persecution to which he was subjected. (4:13)

Although he was fully aware that he could be put to death for advancing Christ's cause, he did not yield to fear. He, like his fellow workers, knew or had the firm assurance that God, who had raised the Lord Jesus, would also raise him "with Jesus" and present (*parístemi*) him (and also his close associates) with the Corinthians. Being members of Christ's body, believers could be spoken of as being raised with him as their head. The words "with Jesus" have also been understood to mean that God would resurrect believers just as he had resurrected Jesus, that he would raise them to life so that they would be with Jesus, or that they would be raised together with Jesus. According to numerous later manuscripts, God would do the resurrecting "through" Jesus. The Greek word *parístemi* literally means "stand beside" and can denote "place beside," "make available," "present," "offer," or "bring before." In this context, Paul seems to have meant that, at the time of the resurrection, God would have him, his fellow workers, and the Corinthians stand before himself as approved. (4:14)

When mentioning “all things” the apostle likely meant everything he and his fellow workers endured when furthering the interests of the Son of God. Their faithful service accompanied by distress and hardships benefited the Corinthians spiritually and thus proved to be for their sake. (4:15)

Paul then added the words, “that the favour, having been increased through the increasing number [of believers], may cause the thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God.” In this case, the “favour,” unearned kindness, or grace may be understood to refer to the divine aid Paul and his close associates received in order to be able to bear up under severe trials when carrying out their ministry. Through their ministry, which was accomplished because of their being recipients of divine favour, many more persons became believers. As the fruit of the faithful labours, the increasing number of believers proved to be an evidence of God’s unearned kindness. In view of the addition of many new believers, the divine favour may be understood as having been increased. Paul, his close associates, and those who had become believers through their ministry would be moved to give thanks to God for all that he had done for them. In this way, thanksgiving abounded or increased, to the glory or praise of the Most High. (4:15; see the Notes section.)

The distress and persecution Paul experienced affected the “outer man” or his physical organism (which wasted away or proved to be in a state of deterioration). Nevertheless, he did not give up in faithfully discharging his commission when faced with hardships. This was because, as he explained, the inner man was being “renewed from day to day.” The inner man, the real self of Paul as a servant of God and Christ, continued to be renewed, with God’s spirit continuing to energize or to strengthen him. (4:16)

Viewed from the standpoint of eternity and the future blessings to be enjoyed in the ages to come, the apostle regarded the distress that he was then undergoing as brief and light. When faithfully endured, the affliction “works out” or leads to a “glory” that makes the existing distress seem light. This glory is not brief or passing but lasts forever. The greatness of that eternal glory is evident from its being described as having “weight,” whereas the distress is called “light.” For the believer (like Paul), the eternal glory includes having a permanent relationship with God and Christ as an approved “son” or child of God and all the privileges and blessings associated with that relationship. (4:17)

The “things seen” refer to the afflictions or distressing troubles, and the “things unseen” designate the future blessings to be enjoyed in the sinless state. Paul set the example in keeping his eyes focused on the unseen realities to come and not the visible hardships he had to endure. He recognized that the things seen would

not continue. They were momentary or transitory, but the things unseen, which were yet to come, would prove to be eternal. (4:18)

### **Notes:**

The first person plural verbs in this chapter (as in previous chapters) always apply to Paul. It is not possible, however, to determine in each case whether the plural is to be understood in an editorial sense or whether the apostle meant to include either his close associates or the larger community of believers.

The meaning of the Greek text of verse 15 is not readily apparent, and this has given rise to a variety of renderings. “Indeed, all this is for your sake, so that, as the abounding grace of God is shared by more and more, the greater may be the chorus of thanksgiving that rises to the glory of God.” (REB ) “We wish you could see how all this is working out for your benefit, and how the more grace God gives, the more thanksgiving will redound to his glory.” (J. B. Phillips) “You see, everything is for your benefit, so that as grace spreads, so, to the glory of God, thanksgiving may also overflow among more and more people.” (NJB) “All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God.” (NIV) “All of these things are for your benefit. And as God’s grace brings more and more people to Christ, there will be great thanksgiving, and God will receive more and more glory.” (NLT) “All these things are for you. And so the grace of God that is being given to more and more people will bring increasing thanks to God for his glory.” (NCV) “For everything is for your sakes, in order that grace, being more richly bestowed because of the thanksgivings of the increased number, may more and more promote the glory of God.” (Weymouth)

## **2 Corinthians 5:1-21**

### **5:1-13. The glory of the ministry – its fearlessness in the face of death**

#### **Verses 1-8. Its conviction of the resurrection of the body**

The surety of the resurrection hope enabled Paul to maintain his focus on the unseen future realities. “For we know,” he said with unwavering assurance, “that if our earthly home, [this] tent, is dismantled, we have a building from God, a home in the heavens, [an] eternal [one] not made with hands.” The apostle regarded the physical body as a tent or temporary dwelling for the real self or the inner person. Whereas the body may be destroyed or undergo the natural process of decay after death, this has no bearing on the future life of the individual. All who have faith in God and his word of promise know for a certainty that they will have a new dwelling from him. The resurrection body



will not be subject to death and decay, for it is not a body belonging to the human sphere and so is spoken of as not being made with hands. This body is eternal and suited for life in the heavenly realm. (5:1)

While in the earthly tent and subject to afflictions and hardships, believers groan. Like Paul, their yearning is to be clothed with the home from heaven. This is the permanent dwelling that will be enjoyed eternally in a state of freedom from sin and its baneful consequences. (5:2)

One's existence and activity as a person are dependent on having a body. Paul represented the body as the clothing of the real self. Therefore, once the true selves of believers are clothed with the resurrection body, they would not be "found naked." (5:3; see the Notes section.)

The apostle repeated the thought about "groaning" in the earthly tent and spoke of being "weighed down," suggestive of being burdened with trials and distress. He wanted to put off the tent that bore the pain resulting from sin. This did not mean that he wanted to die and be found "unclothed" or without a body, but he yearned for the time when the temporary tent, the mortal body, would be "swallowed up by life," replaced by the new life in the eternal resurrection body, liberated from the burdensome consequences of human sinfulness. (5:4)

God is the one responsible for the sure expectation that the mortal body would be replaced by an immortal one. Paul expressed this thought with the words, "And he who has prepared us for this very [purpose] is God, who has given us the deposit [*arrabón*], the spirit." God's spirit works powerfully in the lives of believers, and their having received the spirit serves as a guarantee that they will receive an incorruptible body. Possession of the spirit is comparable to having a deposit or down payment, assuring that the full payment is to be received. (5:5)

Endowed with God's spirit as the deposit for what would be granted to him in the future, Paul, despite the difficulties and pressures he faced, was always confident or mustered up courage. He was confident even though he knew that, while at home in the physical body, he was absent from the Lord. The implication is that the apostle did not doubt that he would be with the Son of God after his life on earth ended. (5:6)

Paul and fellow believers did not walk by sight, for they were not personally with the Lord Jesus Christ. Their walk or their course of life was one of faith, focused on being united with him in the future. (5:7) Paul's confidence about personally being with Jesus Christ was so firm that he could speak of being

pleased about coming to be absent from the physical body in order to be at home with his Lord. (5:8)

### **Verses 9-13. Results of the conviction of bodily resurrection**

In keeping with his sure hope, the apostle determined to be acceptable to the Lord Jesus Christ, whether at home in the physical body or whether away from it. At the time of Jesus' return as king and judge, believers would be either alive on earth or out of their earthly bodies (because of having died). So it appears that Paul meant that his desire was to be found in an approved condition at the time of Christ's return (whether that be while he was still in his earthly "tent" or whether that be after his earthly life had ended). (5:9)

For believers, Christ's return will result in a time of judgment or accounting. Paul continued, "For all of us must appear before Christ's judgment seat, that each [of us] may be repaid for the things done in the body, whether good or vile." The nature of this judgment is not primarily for the purpose of determining punishment. It will be an assessment of individual conduct or whether the deeds done in the body merit censure or approval. Although believers come to be in possession of the real or eternal life in its ultimate sense, the Lord Jesus Christ will have them render an account regarding how they have used the gifts entrusted to them, the manner in which they have treated others, and their motivations, words, and deeds. (5:10)

While on earth, Jesus revealed that, at the time of judgment, persons who proved to be faithful and industrious would be rewarded, and individuals who were indolent and did not use their potential to the full in advancing his cause would lose rewards. (Luke 12:35-48; 19:15-19) Details concerning this judgment are not provided. Nevertheless, the certainty of the future judgment should give believers reason for serious thought about the way in which they are living their lives. They need to have a wholesome fear of the Lord Jesus Christ, being serious about wanting his approval at the time of judgment.

In discharging his commission as an apostle, Paul did so with a full awareness of his accountability to the Son of God. For this reason, he could speak of "knowing the fear of the Lord." On account of his reverential fear, Paul sought to "persuade men," conducting himself in a manner that would appeal to the consciences of those with whom he shared the good news about Jesus Christ. He diligently avoided whatever could have given rise to needless offense, maintaining exemplary conduct and not insisting on his own rights. His fellow workers likewise demonstrated a wholesome fear of the Lord Jesus Christ, and

the apostle's use of the first person plural verbs may have been intended to include them. (5:11)

To God, nothing about Paul's thoughts, words, or deeds nor those of his close associates were hidden. So the apostle could say, "We have been made known to God." He then added, "I hope that also to your consciences we have been made known." In view of the individuals who had questioned his motives and made attacks against him, Paul did not speak with the same confidence about the Corinthian believers as he did about God. In their case, he expressed the hope (not the complete assurance) that their individual consciences would have responded favourably to the way in which he had conducted himself while with them. (5:11)

Paul did not again attempt to recommend himself (as some might have wrongly concluded). His aim was to give the Corinthians occasion or grounds for "boasting," or taking pride in him, and thus being able to respond to persons who boasted on the basis of outward appearances (literally, the "face") and not the "heart." The "face" or outward appearance could have included eloquence and an impressive personality. Persons who gloried in outward appearances (which can be deceptive) failed to see what the "heart" is. They did not recognize the real person, the identity of the individual in the inmost self and which identity is reflected in attitude or disposition, word, and action that are of a nature which commends itself to the consciences of others. (5:12)

Paul's zeal, devotion, and intensity may have caused some to conclude that he was beside himself or seemed to be out of his mind. If he appeared as one who had lost his senses, it was for God. Especially in view of the great mercy extended to him, Paul had an overwhelming sense of the unmerited kindness he had been shown, and this motivated him to exert himself vigorously to carry out his ministry. If he appeared to be of sound mind as he taught the truth about Jesus Christ, it was for the Corinthians or for their benefit. (5:13)

## **5:14-21 The glory of the ministry – its motives and dignity**

### **Verses 14-17. Its glorious motive**

The "love of the Christ" can refer either to the love Christ has for believers or the love believers have for him. In the context of the surrender of his life, the more likely significance would appear to be his love for believers. This love has either impelling or controlling power. The Greek word *synécho* can convey the thought of exerting pressure, which may be either to prompt action or to restrain activity. Modern translations have variously rendered Paul's words. (5:14) "For

the love of Christ urges us on.” (NRSV) “For Christ’s love compels us.” (NIV) “The very spring of our actions is the love of Christ.” (J. B. Phillips) “For the love of Christ controls us.” (REB) “We are ruled by Christ’s love for us.” (CEV) “For the love of Christ overwhelms us.” (NJB)

The Greek participle meaning “we having judged” (form of the verb *kríno*) relates to having come to a firm conviction. Paul and fellow believers had no doubt that one, Christ, had died for all, and “so all have died.” Death is the penalty for sin, and Christ took upon himself the full penalty for all sin and all sinners. In that sense, all died with him. (5:14)

For believers, the fact that Christ died for everyone has had a profound effect on their lives. Upon accepting him and his sacrificial death for them, they have ceased to be dead in trespasses. As persons granted a newness of life as approved children of God, they no longer live for themselves, conducting themselves in ways that are typical of persons without any relationship to him and his Son. Instead, they live for the one who died for them and rose from the dead, earnestly seeking to do what pleases the Son of God and serves to further his interests. (5:15)

The status of believers as persons who have ceased to be under condemnation and are in possession of a newness of life has also resulted in looking at others differently. Speaking of himself (and probably also including fellow believers), Paul continued, “So from now on we know no one according to the flesh. Even if we have known Christ according to the flesh, now, however, we no longer know [him in this way].” This knowing “according to the flesh” relates to looking at others on the basis of outward appearances, using the standards of evaluation of a world in a state of alienation from God. Approved children of God do not “know,” recognize, or regard anyone on the basis of outward appearances, including eloquence, impressive personality, social status, wealth, or influence. (5:16)

The significance of knowing Christ “according to the flesh” depends on whether the first person plural Greek verbs apply to the apostle only or include the Corinthians and other believers. The biblical accounts provide no indication that Paul had seen or heard Jesus speak during the time he taught in Jerusalem. As one whom Gamaliel instructed, Paul must have heard something about Jesus, leading him to draw conclusions about him. (Acts 22:3; 26:26.) These conclusions would have been “according to the flesh.” They would have been based on faulty human reasoning. Examples of the kind of conclusions to which individuals came are preserved in the Scriptures. Some maintained that he was a “good man”; others insisted that he deceived the crowds. (John 7:12) There were

Jews who regarded him as a prophet, but others viewed him as an impostor, a transgressor of the law, a drunkard and a glutton, a man who enjoyed the company of tax collectors and sinners. (Matthew 27:63; Luke 7:16, 34; John 9:16) The very fact that Paul had been a rabid persecutor of Christ's disciples reveals that he considered the Son of God to have been a deceiver, a false Messiah. In that distorted sense, Paul "knew" Jesus "according to the flesh." (5:16)

Other believers may initially have held like negative views about Jesus, views that were based on things they had heard about him. All such former knowing of Jesus "according to the flesh" ended when they put their faith in him. (5:16)

Believers are "in Christ" or at one with him as members of his body. "If anyone [is] in Christ, [he is (or there is)] a new creation." Those who are at one with the Son of God are children of his Father, forgiven of their sins and in possession of a new life free from condemnation. In that sense, they are new persons, eliminating any basis for making judgments "according to the flesh," outward appearances, or human standards or opinions. In the case of believers, "the old things have passed away." Their old or former condition ended and, by reason of coming to be at one with Christ, "new things have come be." From a state of enmity with and alienation from God, they entered into an approved relationship with him as his children, united to him through his unique Son. (5:17)

### **Verses 18-21. Its wonderful dignity.**

Paul gave the credit to God for the change that had taken place, saying, "But all things [are] from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and given us the ministry of reconciliation." Sin alienated all humans from God, making it necessary for sins to be forgiven in order to end the condition of alienation. God himself provided the means for reconciliation by having his Son die for sinners. As one who had become reconciled to God through Christ, Paul was entrusted with the "ministry of reconciliation." (5:18)

Commenting further on the nature of the reconciliation, Paul continued, "God, in Christ, was reconciling a world to himself, not reckoning to them their trespasses, and he committed the message of reconciliation to us." It is "in Christ" (or by coming to be at one with him through their faith in him and what his sacrificial death accomplished) that God made it possible for the world of mankind to be reconciled to him. Because his Son died for sinners, God no longer reckoned transgressions against those who accepted his arrangement for having their sins forgiven. Paul was one to whom the "word" or "message" of reconciliation was entrusted. When discharging the ministry that had been

granted him, he made known to others how, on the basis of their faith in Christ and what he had accomplished by his sacrificial death, they could become reconciled to God as part of his family of beloved children. (5:19)

Because Christ is the one through whom the reconciliation is effected, Paul, as one who made known the message about reconciliation, acted for him. The apostle's role was that of an ambassador for Christ. It was also God's will that humans accept the arrangement he had made for them to be reconciled to him. So God's appeal for humans to be reconciled to him was being made through Paul and other believers, and it was also an entreaty that was being made for Christ, the one who wanted humans to be at peace with his Father and had made reconciliation possible through his sacrificial death. (5:20)

Jesus Christ did not "know" sin from the standpoint of his being sinless and so as one who had never experienced sin as a participant. But God made him "sin for us," having him take upon himself all human sin (past, present, and future) and its penalty by dying for sinners. As a result, in Christ, "we might become righteousness of God." By coming to be at one with Christ as members of his body, believers come to be "righteousness of God," having God regard them as having the flawless uprightness of his Son, the head of the corporate body. The Son is the perfect image of his Father, and his righteousness is the same as that of his Father. (5:21)

### **Notes:**

In verse 3, the Greek word for "clothe" or "put on" is *endyo*, and a form of this verb appears in the oldest extant manuscripts and many others. There are manuscripts that contain a form of the verb *ekdyo*, meaning "take off" or "strip off." This accounts for the different renderings in modern translations. "Because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked." (NIV) "In the hope that, being thus clothed, we shall not find ourselves naked." (REB) "If indeed, when we have taken it off, we shall not be found naked." (NAB) "If indeed, when we have taken it off we will not be found naked." (NRSV)

Jesus Christ had assured his disciples that he would be with them to the very end of the age. (Matthew 28:20) But this referred to his being with them in spirit. While in their earthly "tent," believers are not with him in the literal sense but (as Paul expressed it [in verse 6]) are "absent from the Lord."

In verse 17, the concluding words differ in ancient manuscripts ("look! new things have come to be"; "look! all things have become new"). The oldest

manuscripts contain the reading without the expression that is rendered “all things.”

## **2 Corinthians 6:1-18**

### **6:1-10 The glory of the ministry – its character**

#### **Verses 1-3. It is to be blameless**

The opening Greek word *synergéo*, meaning “working with,” does not have an object. Earlier (in 5:20), God is represented as making the entreaty through the ambassadors for Christ. So there is a basis for considering “God” to be the object, and numerous translations contain renderings that make the reference to God explicit (“God’s fellow workers [NIV]; “sharing in God’s work” [REB]; “work together with God” [CEV]; “workers together with God” [NCV]). As a participant in God’s work, Paul appealed to fellow believers not to accept God’s gracious favour or unmerited kindness “in vain.” For believers, God’s favour related to having their sins forgiven and coming to be reconciled to him. If they were to fail in living upright lives as God’s obedient children, they would be acting contrary to the purpose for which they had been shown his favour. This would mean that their initial acceptance of it would prove to be for nothing. (6:1)

With an apparent reference to God as the speaker, Paul continued, “For he says,” and then quoted from Isaiah 49:8 (LXX), “In an acceptable time I heard you, and in a day of deliverance I helped you.” The apostle then made an application, “Look! Now [is] the acceptable time. Look! Now [is] the day of deliverance.” It was the “acceptable,” right, or appropriate time for entreating others to become reconciled to God and for appealing to those who had responded to the appeal to live in keeping with its purpose. It proved to be a time for God to “hear” or respond favourably to those who desired reconciliation with him. From the standpoint of seizing the opportunity to have God’s favourable hearing, it was also an acceptable time for the world of mankind. It was a “day of deliverance” or salvation, for it opened up to responsive ones forgiveness of sin and deliverance from the resultant condemnation. (6:2)

In working together with God, Paul determined not to give anyone reason for legitimate offense, for he did not want his ministry to be faulted. (6:3) Using the first person plural verbs, he apparently spoke of his own course and indicated how he, “in all [circumstances],” recommended himself as a minister or servant of God.

## **Verses 4-10. It is to be approved**

Paul endured much, repeatedly facing hardships, mistreatment, and hostility. While sharing the message about Christ with others, he experienced tribulations or afflictions and found himself in needy or distressing circumstances and in difficulties. (6:4)

He was beaten, imprisoned, and thronged by enraged mobs. Besides working hard in advancing Christ's cause, he laboured with his own hands for life's necessities. Paul often went without sleep and food. (6:5)

Despite the troubles and hardships the apostle endured, he recommended himself as God's servant by the "purity" of his life, the "knowledge" about God and Christ he imparted to others, the "patience" he displayed, bearing up without becoming bitter or resentful, and the "kindness" he manifested in his dealings with others. Paul's reference to recommending himself in "Holy Spirit" may be understood to mean that he continually allowed God's spirit to guide him in thought, word, and deed. Moreover, the spiritual gifts with which he had been endowed revealed the operation of God's spirit within him. The "love" Paul showed in carrying out his commission was "unhypocritical," a genuine reflection of his deep care and concern for others. He was willing to forego personal interests and rights in order to appeal to the conscience of those to whom he proclaimed the good news about Christ and to the conscience of believers. (6:6)

The expression "truthful word" (literally, "word of truth") may be understood to relate either to the apostle's proclaiming a truthful message or to his being truthful in his speaking. He relied on the "power of God" and not on his own strength or ability. The "weapons of righteousness" that Paul used were of a spiritual kind. He employed them for the benefit of others in battling error or anything that stood in the way of the advancement of Christ's cause. In literal warfare, the right hand would usually be used for wielding a sword or another weapon, whereas the shield would be held in the left hand. So, when referring to the "weapons of righteousness" as being on the "right and the left," Paul meant offensive and defensive spiritual implements. His primary weapon would have been the "sword of the spirit" or the "word of God," which word or message exposes error and reveals the truth about how to be reconciled to God through his Son. (6:7; Ephesians 6:17; see Ephesians 6:14-17 for a description of the spiritual armour.)

In expression of unmerited divine favour, Paul had been called to be an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ. In his capacity as an apostle, Paul was in possession of



glory or honour. By faithfully discharging his sacred trust, he did so “through glory.” At the same time, when declaring the glad tidings about Jesus Christ, he was subjected to abuse and misrepresentation. Accordingly, he also recommended himself as God’s minister through the dishonour opposers or detractors heaped upon him. The “bad report” could designate the slander or insult that was directed against Paul, and the “good report” could relate to the kindly expressions of commendation made about him as a devoted apostle. There were those who maligned Paul, maintaining that he was a deceiver with ulterior motives. Others recognized him to be exemplary in trustworthiness and truthfulness. So Paul could speak of recommending himself as God’s minister both as a deceiver (one falsely accused of being such) and a truthful person. (6:8)

To the world alienated from God, Paul was unknown. In the eyes of people generally, he did not have the kind of wealth and position that distinguished famous men. Yet, among believers, he was recognized as an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ and a beloved brother, a fellow member of God’s family. The apostle could speak of himself as dying because he repeatedly faced dangers that could have led to his death, but he lived. Through the operation of God’s spirit, the man he was in his inmost self continued to be revived and strengthened, and time and again he was delivered from mortal perils. Likely Paul regarded the difficulties and hardships he encountered as “discipline,” serving to mold him to be conformed ever closer to the image of God’s beloved Son. (Compare Hebrews 12:4-11.) Although the discipline in the form of trials and suffering proved to be severe, the apostle had not yet endured to the point of death. (6:9)

Paul spoke of himself as “being saddened but ever rejoicing.” He was deeply grieved when fellow believers became unfaithful or failed in conducting themselves as obedient children of God and when his fellow countrymen and others did not respond to the good news about Jesus Christ. (2:4; Romans 9:2, 3; Philippians 3:18) Nevertheless, he could at all times rejoice in the Lord Jesus Christ, being filled with joy on account of being at one with him, having been extended extraordinary kindness and mercy, and continuing to be the recipient of divine aid and guidance. From a material standpoint, Paul was poor. He had no home of his own and laboured with his hands to care for his basic needs. From a spiritual standpoint, though, he was in a position to make many “rich,” imparting to them the vital knowledge about God and his Son that opened up the priceless treasure of coming to be members of God’s family of beloved children liberated from sin and its resultant condemnation. As children of God, believers also came to be heirs, destined to enjoy an inheritance in the heavens that was more valuable than any earthly inheritance could possibly be. Whereas the apostle had “nothing” from a material standpoint, he considered himself as

possessing “everything,” for he had the far more valuable enduring spiritual riches that made transitory material wealth appear worthless. (6:10)

### **6:11-7:1. The glory of the ministry – its purity**

#### **6:11-13. Purity is the basis of affection among believers**

With reference to himself, Paul appears to have continued to use the first person plural pronouns and verbs. He had “opened” his mouth to the Corinthians, indicating that he had expressed himself sincerely, not concealing anything. His “heart” had been widened for them, suggesting that he had made ample room for them in his affections. They were very dear to him. (6:11)

As far as Paul was concerned, he had not limited his love for them. The Corinthians, though, had restricted their compassionate, affectionate, or caring feelings for him. (6:12)

For this reason, the apostle spoke to them as one would to children. He told them to “widen out” respecting their affection for him as a recompense for (or in return for or in response to) the unrestricted love he had for them. (6:13)

#### **6:14-7:1. A plea for purity**

Possibly their close association with unbelievers had contributed to their failure to express love fully. This may explain why Paul, with pointed questions, stressed that the Corinthians should not become yoked with unbelievers. “For what partnership [do] uprightness and lawless [have]? Or what fellowship [does] light [have] with darkness? And what [can be said about] Christ’s harmony with Belial [Satan]? Or what share [does] a believer [have] with an unbeliever? And what agreement [does] the temple of God [have] with idols?” (6:14-16) Uprightness and lawlessness, light and darkness, Christ and Belial or Satan, a believer and an unbeliever, and God’s temple and idols are opposites. No partnership, fellowship, harmony, share, or agreement exists between them. Accordingly, any kind of yoking to unbelievers (or a deliberate choice of intimate or close association) was rightly something the Corinthians needed to avoid in order to safeguard their standing as God’s approved children. (See the Notes section regarding Belial [verse 15].)

Commenting on the sacred status of believers, Paul continued, “For we [you, according to other manuscripts, including P46 (c. 200)] are the temple of the living God.” Idols are lifeless or dead, but the true God is living and has life-giving power. Believers are his people and, as a corporate whole, constitute his temple, for he is with them by means of his spirit. With quotations from the holy

writings, Paul established that God's people are his temple. "As God said," the apostle continued, "I will dwell among them and walk [in their midst], and I will be their God, and they will be my people." This is not an exact quotation of a specific text, but is one that incorporates thoughts expressed in Leviticus 26:12, Jeremiah 32:38 (39:38, LXX), and Ezekiel 37:27. God's residence is his sanctuary, and so his people, among whom he manifests his presence, are his temple. (6:16)

"Therefore," the apostle continued, "come out of their midst and separate [yourselves], says the Lord, and do not touch the unclean [thing], and I will take you in. [Isaiah 52:11] And I will be a father to you, and you will be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty." (2 Samuel 7:14; Isaiah 43:6; Jeremiah 31:9 [38:9, LXX]) Again, the quotations express thoughts found in the sacred writings but do not match the wording of specific passages. As God's people, believers need to guard against contaminating their holy or clean standing. So the Corinthians needed to keep separate from unbelievers, not making them their intimate associates and defiling themselves through joint participation in God-dishonouring practices. Believers have been "taken in" or accepted as part of God's family. They are his sons and daughters, and he is their Father. (6:17, 18; see the Notes section.)

#### **Notes:**

In non-biblical Dead Sea Scrolls (including the Damascus Document and a composition about the heavenly prince Melchizedek [11Q13]), Belial is a designation for Satan, the prince of darkness.

The wording of the quotations in verses 16 through 18 reflects that of the extant Septuagint text.

## 2 Corinthians 7: 1-16

### 7: 2-16. The glory of the ministry – its reflection in Paul's life

#### Verses 2-11. Paul's loving concern for the Corinthian believers

The promises are that God would reside with those whom he recognized as his people and be their Father and that they would be his sons and daughters. These promises should have moved believers to live upright lives, purifying themselves from all “defilement of flesh and spirit.” In a manifestation of their fear or reverential regard for God, they should seek to be complete in “holiness,” or in the purity of their thoughts, words, and deeds. (7:1)

Besides all forms of sexual immorality, use of the physical organism or any of its members for injurious or debased purposes would constitute pollution of the flesh. Idolatry, hatred, jealousy, envy, maliciousness, mercilessness, and a host of other hurtful or destructive attitudes or emotions defile the spirit or the inner life of an individual. For believers to be complete in holiness, they, by yielding to the guidance of God's spirit, need to exert themselves to shun all defiling practices and attitudes. (7:1)

Paul deeply loved the Corinthian believers, but a considerable number among them appear not to have had like affection for him. For this apparent reason, he urged them to make room for him (the pronoun “us” evidently being an editorial first person plural). The apostle reminded them that he had done nothing to justify feelings of alienation from him. He had not wronged, corrupted or seduced, or exploited anyone. (7:2)

His purpose in reminding the Corinthians of his sincerity and uprightness did not spring from a desire to condemn them or to reject them. Paul's love and concern for them remained undiminished. As he had expressed previously (6:11, 12), the Corinthians were in his “heart.” They were very dear to him. Paul was willing to share both life and death with them. Another possible meaning is that, regardless of whether he lived or died, the Corinthians would have a secure place in his affections. (7:3)

The apostle's positive expressions about the Corinthians appear to reflect the good effect the visit of Titus had on them. His love for them made it possible for Paul to be outspoken, holding nothing back. (See the Notes section regarding *parresía*, which term can denote “outspokenness.”) He took pride in them as believers whom he had aided to come into an approved relationship with God through the Lord Jesus Christ and who had responded favourably to needed correction. Their commendable improvement comforted Paul, freeing him from

the anxiety he previously had when the conduct and attitude of certain ones among the Corinthian believers merited strong censure. Consequently, despite personally experiencing distress, he was filled with joy to overflowing. (7:4)

Paul's positive expressions contrasted sharply with the way he felt upon leaving Troas and arriving in Macedonia. He found no relief for his "flesh," for his whole organism proved to be in an unsettled or disturbed state. Paul felt distressed in every way, with "fights without" and "fears within." The "fights without" could either have referred to the disharmony in the Corinthian congregation or the opposition unbelievers directed against Paul. Within himself, he was apprehensive, anxious about how the Corinthians would respond to the letter he had written to them and concerning the kind of reception they would give to Titus. (7:5)

The distress Paul had experienced brought him low, and he attributed to God the comfort or consolation he received upon meeting Titus. It is likely that the apostle considered the desirable change that had occurred among the Corinthians to have resulted through the working of God's spirit. Appropriately, then, Paul acknowledged the comfort he received through the good report from Titus as having been from God, the one who consoles those who are downcast. (7:6)

Although the arrival of Titus brought welcome comfort to Paul, relieving his anxiety about the Corinthians, the consolation was not limited to the presence of Titus. Having been favourably received, Titus himself was comforted by the Corinthians, putting him in a position to tell about their "longing," their "sorrow," and their "zeal" for Paul. The Corinthians yearned to see the apostle again, were saddened on account of their failures, and manifested genuine concern for him. This development among the Corinthians moved Paul to rejoice still more. (7:7)

The letter of reproof he had written to the Corinthians saddened them, but the apostle did not regret having written it. Based on the context, his not regretting having written the letter must have been because they accepted the correction and made the needed changes. At the time Paul wrote the letter, though, he did regret it. He regretted that the troubling circumstances among the Corinthians had made it necessary for him to direct strong reproof to them. The apostle, however, appears to have been relieved that his letter saddened the Corinthians only a little while (literally, an "hour") and produced the desired results. (7:8)

It was not the saddening effect his letter had on the Corinthians that occasioned Paul's rejoicing. His reason for joy was that their sadness produced repentance or genuine regret about the wrong course they had taken. They were saddened

“according to God.” Their sorrow was of a nature that God approved. As a consequence of the good results, no injury had come to the Corinthians from Paul. (7:9)

“For the sadness according to God,” or the kind of sorrow that harmonizes with his way, prompts repentance and leads to salvation, or to deliverance from the condemnation that a wrong course merits. No regret is associated with this godly sadness. The sadness of the world, however, does not produce anything that is good. Individuals may be sad about being exposed as wrongdoers, but they are not moved to genuine repentance. They are merely sorrowful about having been caught as practisers of bad. So their sorrow produces death. In their unrepentant state, they continue to be subject to the condemnation that their lawless ways warrant. (7:10)

Paul invited the Corinthians to take a look at what had happened in their case. Their having been saddened in a divinely approved manner produced “earnestness,” an eager willingness to change, or a zeal for what is right. Paul used the Greek word *apología*, meaning “defence,” to identify another result of godly sadness. This may signify that the Corinthians wanted to vindicate themselves as no longer deserving of censure. Their sorrow also led to “indignation,” “fear,” “longing,” “zeal,” and “punishment” (*ekdíkēsis*) or the rendering of justice. (7:11)

The Corinthians would have become indignant with themselves on account of the error of their ways. Upon recognizing how wrong they had been in their attitude and conduct, they would have become fearful or apprehensive about the consequences. Their “longing” may have involved a desire to restore a good relationship with Paul, one of love and loyalty. Besides eagerly following through on the apostle’s admonition and giving no support to his detractors, the Corinthians may also have demonstrated their zeal for him through expressions of genuine care and concern. (7:11)

The Greek word *ekdíkēsis* could apply to the punishment the Corinthians imposed on the flagrant wrongdoer, thus seeing to it that justice was rendered. They had proved themselves “chaste,” or cleared themselves from blame, in everything pertaining to the matter involving the offender concerning whom Paul had written. (7:11)

### **Verses 12-16. He desires them to be assured of his love**

It was not because of the wrongdoer nor on account of the one who had been wronged that Paul wrote to the Corinthians. His primary objective was that,

before God, their earnestness, or their earnest commitment to him as a beloved brother, would be manifest to them. This did not mean that the apostle had no concern for the injured party and that he did not care about what the wrongdoer had done. In this particular case, the entire community of believers in Corinth was involved. The attitude of the congregation had deteriorated toward Paul, to the injury of the individual members. Accordingly, the restoration of the proper relationship of love and loyalty proved to be of greater importance than the situation involving the wrongdoer. (7:12)

Paul drew great encouragement from the commendable way in which the Corinthians had responded, resulting in personal joy. He rejoiced even more on account of the joy of Titus. The manner in which the Corinthians accepted Titus “refreshed his spirit.” This could mean that the mind of Titus had been set at rest, relieving him of any anxiety he may have had about them. (7:13)

Although the Corinthians had previously disappointed him by the way they had conducted themselves and had failed to be supportive of him, Paul must have felt that they would make the essential changes in attitude and action. This appears to have been the nature of his “boast” regarding them to Titus. The Corinthians did live up to the apostle’s confidence in them, and so he was not put to shame as one whose boasting about them had been unfounded. Just as everything Paul had said to the Corinthians proved to be true, so also had his boasting to Titus regarding them. (7:14)

In view of his experience with them, Titus came to have greater and deeper affection for the Corinthians. He fondly remembered their obedience, and how they had accepted him “with fear and trembling.” They did not resist him or reject his words, but responded submissively to the way in which Titus handled the assignment the apostle had entrusted to him. In his letter, Paul had exposed the error of the Corinthians, leaving no doubt that they deserved strong censure. This doubtless prompted them to receive Titus with “fear and trembling.” They were apprehensive about how he would react to their missteps. (7:15)

Paul’s previous anxiety and disappointment regarding the Corinthians had yielded to joy. He rejoiced, because he had confidence in them “in everything.” This could mean that he had complete confidence in the Corinthians or that his confidence in them had proved to be true in every respect. (7:16)

### **Notes:**

In verse 4, the Greek word *parresía* can mean “outspokenness,” “openness,” “frankness,” “confidence,” or “boldness.” Translators have variously

represented Paul as often boasting about the Corinthians (NRSV), as speaking “with great frankness” to them (REB), as feeling “very sure” of them (NCV), as trusting them completely (CEV), as always speaking the truth to them (CEV, footnote), or as speaking freely to them (CEV, footnote). The thought of openness or speaking freely or frankly appears to fit the context best. Moreover, the apostle next mentioned taking pride in the Corinthians, which is not significantly different from boasting about them or expressing confidence in them.

In verse 8, many manuscripts introduce the thought about the temporary saddening effect of the letter with the words, “for I see,” but a number of manuscripts do not include “for.”

The wrongdoer mentioned in verse 12 may have been the incestuous man concerning whom Paul had written in his previous letter. If this identification is correct, the father would have been the injured party. (1 Corinthians 5:1) This, though, is not explicitly expressed in 2 Corinthians. There is a possibility, as some have concluded, that the offender had sinned against Paul, possibly by defiantly disregarding his apostolic authority and slandering him.

According to the Greek text of verse 12, the concluding words are, “before God.” Modern translations vary in the placement of this phrase, with resultant different meanings. “I wrote the letter so you could see, before God, the great care you have for us.” (NCV) “My aim in writing was to help to make plain to you, in the sight of God, how truly you are devoted to us.” (REB)

## **2 Corinthians 8: 1-24**

### **8:1-15. Example and exhortation in giving**

#### **Verses 1-8. Christian giving and the example of the Macedonian Christians**

Our heavenly Father expressed his gracious favour when making it possible for humans to be reconciled to him by what his Son did when dying for sinners. This revealed God’s boundless love and concern for them. Understandably, therefore, Paul attributed the generosity of the believers in Macedonia to God’s unmerited favour. Their generosity was rooted in deep appreciation for the incomparable kindness their heavenly Father had shown them.

The apostle wanted the Corinthian believers, his brothers, to know about the gracious divine favour that had been granted to the congregations of believers in the neighbouring Roman province of Macedonia. He then called attention to the extraordinary generosity of the Macedonians as the evidence for their having



been given God's gracious favour. By implication, the apostle encouraged a like generous spirit among the Corinthians. (8:1)

He did not explain the nature of the very trying distress or affliction to which believers in Macedonia had been subjected. They were not well off materially and encountered intense hostility from unbelievers. Opposers may have plundered them of possessions, making their circumstances even more difficult. (1 Thessalonians 2:14; compare Hebrews 10:34.) Yet, despite their great distress and their deep poverty, their joy abounded and found expression in the overflowing richness of their generosity. (8:2)

Paul could testify that the giving of the Macedonians was not just "according to [their] ability." It went beyond their means. Of their own accord, they had been moved to want to share with needy fellow believers the little they themselves had. In their generous giving, they went beyond what might have been expected from persons with limited means. (8:3)

The Macedonians strongly entreated Paul, yes, begged him, for the "favour [of being able to participate] and the [actual] share in the service for the holy ones." They considered being able to give as a favour or kindness, earnestly desiring to provide help for their fellow believers, the destitute "holy ones" in Jerusalem. (8:4; see the Notes section.)

Concerning the Macedonians, Paul continued, "And not as we hoped." This may be understood to mean that the Macedonians did more than the apostle could possibly have expected. (8:5) Numerous translations make this significance explicit. "And their giving surpassed our expectations." (REB) "And they gave in a way we did not expect." (NCV) "And they did more than we had hoped." (CEV) "It was not something that we expected of them." (NJB)

"First," or most importantly, they gave themselves to the Lord (God, according to other manuscripts, including P46 [c. 200]). At the time of their becoming believers, they placed themselves fully at the disposal of the Lord Jesus Christ, earnestly seeking to conduct themselves in harmony with his example and teaching. In view of Jesus Christ's oneness with his Father, they would also have given themselves to God, determined to do his will. Therefore, whether the original reading refers to the Lord Jesus Christ or to his Father is immaterial. The Macedonians also gave themselves to Paul, doing what they could to assist him. Their giving proved to be "through God's will," indicating that it was in response to the divine will. (8:5)

In view of the generous spirit of the Macedonians, Paul was particularly concerned that the Corinthians would not fall short in their giving. While in Corinth, Titus had already started the arrangement to provide aid for the poor believers in Jerusalem. Therefore, Paul appealed to him to complete this gracious “favour,” or the relief effort. (8:6)

The apostle spoke commendably about the Corinthians, referring to them as “abounding in everything.” He then identified “all things” as being “faith,” “word,” “knowledge,” “all eagerness,” and “our love for you” (“your love for us,” according to other manuscripts). As believers, the Corinthians did have faith in God and Christ, and their faith deserved commendation. They were not lacking in “word,” or in the ability to express themselves, and they were in possession of the vital knowledge concerning the Lord Jesus Christ and his Father. They had already manifested an eagerness to give. (8:7; compare verses 11 and 12.)

It appears that the oldest extant manuscript (P46) and fourth-century Codex Vaticanus preserve the original reading (“our love for you”). There was room for improvement respecting the love of the Corinthians for Paul, but he himself had not restricted his love for them. (Compare 6:12, 13.) As they abounded, or were rich, in the things he had enumerated, Paul also wanted the Corinthians to excel in gracious giving. (8:7)

By what he had said to them, the apostle did not intend to command them to contribute, for he desired their giving to stem from a pure motive. Paul, “through the eagerness of others,” desired to test the genuineness of their love. This may be understood to mean that the eagerness of the Macedonians to aid poor believers in Jerusalem would be the standard by which the love of the Corinthians would be tested. (8:8)

### **Verses 9-15. Christian giving and the example of Christ**

Paul reminded them about “the favour of our Lord Jesus Christ.” The Corinthians did know that the Son of God had given his life for them, which was an unmerited favour beyond compare. As his Father’s dearly beloved Son, he shared with him in the ownership of everything in heaven and on earth. In his heavenly estate, the Son was rich. Yet he became poor, emptying himself of all the splendour he possessed and living as a man of little means on earth so as to surrender his life for sinful humans, including the Corinthians. Thus, through Christ’s poverty, the believers in Corinth had become rich. They had been forgiven of their sins and become reconciled to God as his beloved children, with a permanent inheritance in heaven. All material wealth amounts to nothing

when compared to the priceless treasure of being God's children and enjoying all the privileges and blessings associated therewith. (8:9; see the Notes section.)

Regarding the contribution for the poor believers in Jerusalem, Paul next expressed his opinion. In the previous year, the Corinthians had started to do something regarding the relief effort and had demonstrated a desire to act. (8:10) So, in view of what they had begun earlier, he admonished them to complete the arrangement based on their means, matching their actual performance with their previous eagerness to share in helping poor fellow believers in Jerusalem. (8:11)

If there is an eagerness to give, the value of that giving is determined according to what a person has, not according to what the individual does not have. Those with limited means are not in a position to give as much as are the materially prosperous. What counts is an eager desire to contribute in proportion to the available resources. (8:12)

To provide aid for needy believers in Jerusalem, Paul did not intend to relieve others and make it difficult for the Corinthians. Rather, he purposed that an equalizing be effected, with the surplus of some offsetting the lack of others. (8:13)

At that particular time, the Corinthians were in a position to give from their surplus to aid needy ones, and the surplus of the ones being helped could fill the need of the Corinthians. This would result in an equalizing, with the surplus of one making up the lack of another. (8:14)

A number of translations render the words of verse 14 to mean that those who would then be receiving aid might at a future time help the Corinthians in their time of need. "At the moment your surplus meets their need, but one day your need may be met from their surplus. The aim is equality." (REB) "At present your plenty should supply their need, and then at some future date their plenty may supply your need. In that way we share with each other." (J. B. Phillips) "At this time you have plenty. What you have can help others who are in need. Then later, when they have plenty, they can help you when you are in need, and all will be equal." (NCV) "But it is only fair for you to share with them when you have so much, and they have so little. Later, when they have more than enough, and you are in need, they can share with you. Then everyone will have a fair share." (CEV) The Greek text, though, does not refer to a future sharing, and it does not seem likely that Paul would have thought in terms of a future material reciprocation from those who were then in need.

As the poor believers in Jerusalem received aid from fellow believers in numerous other cities, the Corinthians would likewise be aided if they came to be in need. Moreover, non-Jewish believers had benefited spiritually from Jewish believers. So it is more likely that Paul regarded the surplus of the poor believers in Jerusalem as being of a spiritual kind. This “surplus” would have included their prayers of thanksgiving and their supplications for believers who had come to their aid. (Compare Romans 15:27; 2 Corinthians 9:10-14.)

Regarding the equalizing, Paul quoted from Exodus 16:18, “The one [gathering] much did not have too much, and the one [gathering] little did not have too little.” This referred to the experience of the Israelites when they collected a supply of manna. They appear to have estimated the amount they would need, and some gathered more than an omer (about two dry quarts) per person, whereas others collected less than an omer for each family member. Upon returning home and measuring the amount they had gathered, everyone had just the right amount. (8:15)

### **8:16-9:5. Instruction in wise handling of funds**

#### **8:16-24. The Lord’s money is to be handled in a manner above reproach**

The apostle thanked God for having put into the “heart” (the inmost self) of Titus “earnestness” or deep concern for the Corinthians. This “earnestness” proved to be the same loving care and concern Paul himself had. (8:16)

The apostle had asked Titus to return to Corinth. Titus had not just responded to this appeal. Earnest or sincere about wanting to go, he had left for Corinth of his own accord. (8:17)

With Titus, Paul sent another trustworthy brother. The apostle did not identify this brother by name but described him as one whose “praise” or outstanding reputation “in the evangel” was recognized throughout “all the congregations.” These congregations would have been all the communities of believers that were known to the Corinthians. The unnamed brother’s reputation “in the evangel” or the glad tidings about Jesus Christ likely related to diligence and zeal in advancing the interests of God’s Son. (8:18; see the Notes section.)

Paul had not acted on his own initiative in selecting this brother. “Not only” was the unnamed brother highly esteemed, but all the congregations who knew him had appointed him as the apostle’s travel companion in order to administer the “favour” (the relief effort for the destitute believers in Jerusalem), doing so for the “glory of the Lord” and Paul’s “eagerness” (literally, “our eagerness”; “your eagerness,” according to later manuscripts). The contribution from the

congregations consisting mainly of non-Jewish believers would have served for the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. It would have provided tangible evidence of the love and deep concern believers had come to have for one another because of their faith in him and what he had done for them by sacrificing his life. The contribution would also have revealed Paul's eagerness in following through on his desire to keep the poor in mind and come to their aid. (8:19; compare Galatians 2:10).

Having been obtained from numerous congregations, the contribution for the needy believers must have been significant. By having recognized trustworthy brothers accompany him, Paul endeavored to make sure that no suspicion would be cast on his administering this generous gift. (8:20) Stressing that nothing from the contributed funds would be for personal use, Paul added, "For good [things] we are intending, not only before the Lord [God, according to other manuscripts], but also before men." This could mean that, in connection with all matters, Paul concerned himself about doing what is right both in the sight of God (or Jesus Christ [if the reading "Lord" designates the Son of God]) and fellow humans. (8:21)

With Titus and the unnamed brother, Paul also sent another brother whom he did not name. The apostle described the brother as one he had often (or in many ways) tested (or found to be exemplary and trustworthy in varied circumstances and situations). Paul had no doubt about this brother's earnestness or willingness to serve unselfishly. As for the brother himself, he had come to have great confidence in the Corinthians, resulting in his being even more earnest in his desire to assist with the contribution. (8:22)

Focusing on Titus, Paul identified him as his "partner" and a "fellow worker" for the Corinthians (a brother laboring with the apostle in promoting their spiritual welfare) and thereby expressed his complete trust in him. The other brothers who would be accompanying Titus (the two unnamed ones whom the apostle mentioned earlier) were "apostles" or "sent forth ones" from the congregations where they had ministered, and so were men in whom fellow believers had full confidence. These brothers were also "the glory of Christ," reflecting favourably on him as Lord in their conduct and dealings. (8:23)

Paul admonished the Corinthians to give proof of their love and the rightness of his boasting or his expressing pride or confidence in them, doing so before the other congregations. Believers in Corinth and other parts of Achaia would have shown their love for Titus and the brothers with him upon warmly welcoming them and cooperating with the arrangements for the relief effort. Their generosity in contributing would have shown their love for needy fellow

believers and revealed that the apostle's pride in them had not been misplaced. (8:24)

**Notes:**

In verse 4, Paul, as in verse 1, again used the first person plural pronouns and verbs. The change from the first person singular verb ("I testify"), found in verse 3, does not appear to be significant. This is a dictated letter, and consistency in the use of the first person singular and the first person plural in an editorial sense is not to be expected.

Fourth-century Codex Vaticanus omits "Christ" in verse 9.

The wording of the quotation from Exodus 16:18 (in verse 15) is not exactly the same as that in the extant Septuagint text, but the meaning is identical.

Luke has been suggested as the brother who accompanied Titus, but there really is no way to know whom the apostle meant. (8:18)

As elsewhere in much of 2 Corinthians, Paul appears to have used the first person plural pronouns and verbs editorially with reference to himself. The reading "your eagerness" (verse 19), which has limited manuscript support, would refer to the eagerness or willingness of the Corinthians to share in the relief effort for the poor believers in Jerusalem.

In verse 21, the reading "Lord" has the most manuscript support, but the oldest extant manuscript (P46, c. 200) and a number of others contain the word "God."

One common conjecture is that Apollos is the unnamed brother mentioned in verse 22.

## 2 Corinthians 9:1-15

### 9:1-5. The Corinthians are urged to meet their share

Paul did not deem it necessary to write more concerning the “service for the holy ones” (the contribution for needy believers in Jerusalem). He felt it was superfluous to do so because of knowing that the Corinthians (and also others in the Roman province of Achaia) were ready to share in the relief effort and had made preparations for it a year before he wrote this letter. The apostle had “boasted” to the Macedonians about the eagerness of believers in Achaia to make contributions for the needy ones and the preparations they had made for the relief effort. As a consequence, many believers in Macedonia had been stimulated to participate. (9:1, 2)

Paul desired to make sure that the confidence he had expressed regarding believers in Corinth and other parts of Achaia would not prove to be “empty” or unwarranted. For this reason, he sent the “brothers” (Titus and two others) to complete arrangements, assuring that the believers in Achaia would be ready with the donation as he had said they would be. (9:3)

In the event Paul came to Corinth with Macedonians, he wanted to be sure that the believers in Achaia would be ready with the contribution. If they were not, his boasting about them would be put to shame and so would they. It would have been an embarrassment both to Paul and to the believers in Achaia for the Macedonians to witness their failure to follow through on their initial eager intent. Especially would this have been the case because the believers in Achaia were better off materially than were those in Macedonia. (9:4)

To prevent any possible embarrassment, Paul called upon Titus and the two other brothers to precede him in going to Corinth, arranging for the previously promised “blessing [gift]” (the contribution for the needy believers in Jerusalem) to be ready. By having the contribution ready in advance of Paul’s arrival, the believers in Achaia would be making it available as a “blessing [gift]” (a voluntary contribution) and not as something that had been forced upon them or extorted from them. In the Greek text, the noun *pleonexía*, appears. This term means “covetousness” or an inordinate desire for more. According to the context, the term describes a gift that is grudgingly granted as if it had been extorted upon having become an object of covetousness. (9:5)

## **9:6-15. Principles of spiritual giving**

### **Verse 6. The principle of harvest**

Encouraging a generous spirit, Paul focused on the principle that the one who sows little would also reap little, whereas the one who sows much (literally, “blessings”) would also reap much (literally, “blessings”). (9:6)

### **Verse 7. The principle of free-will donation**

In keeping with this principle, he admonished the believers in Achaia to give as they had individually determined in their “heart” (their inner self), not doing so out of “sorrow” (as if pained to give) nor out of a sense of pressure or compulsion to contribute. The apostle encouraged the kind of voluntary giving that brought joy to the giver when quoting words from Proverbs 22:8 (LXX), “For God loves a cheerful giver.” (9:7)

### **Verses 8-10. The principle of grace**

Rightly motivated generous giving would not result in lack, for God can make his gracious favour abound to believers or bless them beyond their needs. Under the usual circumstances of life, they would also have enough for themselves and still be in a position to share generously in “every good work” (or in various ways to provide aid to those in need). (9:8)

With a quotation from Psalm 111:9 (LXX), Paul indicated that the generous giver would be richly blessed. “He has scattered; he has given to the poor. His righteousness endures forever.” In the apostle’s use of this passage, the righteousness may be understood to relate to the doing of what is right for those in need. The record of this righteousness is enduring and does not escape God’s notice. This assures that God would continue to look approvingly upon the rightly motivated giver and grant him his blessing. (9:9)

Pointing to God as the source of generous giving, the apostle referred to him as the one who “provides seed to the sower and bread for food.” Paul then made an application to the believers in Achaia respecting their giving, telling them that God would “supply and multiply [their] seed and increase the products of [their] righteousness.” In this case, their “seed” would designate the means for their sustenance. With God’s blessing, they would have enough for themselves and sufficient to be able to share with those in need. Their generous contributions to aid others would prove to be the products of their righteousness or their right action prompted by genuine love. God’s blessing had made it possible for them



to give, and so he is the one to whom Paul appropriately attributed the increase in the products of their righteousness. (9:10)

### **Verses 11-15. The principle of thanksgiving**

On account of God's blessing, the believers in Achaia were "enriched in everything," making it possible for them to participate in generous giving (literally "all generosity"). Commenting on the result of their generosity, Paul continued, "[This], through us, works out in thanksgiving to God." The pronoun "us" may here denote the apostle and those who would be involved in getting the contributed funds to Jerusalem. The destitute believers would receive aid through Paul and those associated with him. Therefore, he could speak of the thanksgiving of the needy ones as being "through us." (9:11)

Numerous modern translations make this significance explicit. "Through our action such generosity will issue in thanksgiving to God." (REB) "Then many people will thank God when we deliver your gift." (CEV) "You will be rich enough in every way for every kind of generosity that makes people thank God for what we have done." (NJB) "Your gifts, administered through us, will mean that many will thank God." (J. B. Phillips)

The contribution for the needy ones ("the ministry of this service") would accomplish more than just filling the lack of the "holy ones" (the poor believers in Jerusalem). It would also overflow with much thanksgiving to God, for the recipients would express their gratitude in prayer. (9:12)

Paul spoke of the ministry for the needy ones as a "proof" ("through [or 'because of'] the proof of this service"). This may be understood to mean that the service for the poor revealed the givers' genuine faith in God and Christ. The tangible evidence of a living faith would provide the basis for those who were helped to glorify or praise God. (Compare James 2:14-17.) The offering of praise would be because those who had been helped recognized that their fellow believers, through their generosity, revealed "subjection to [their] confession of the evangel of Christ." Acceptance of the glad tidings about Christ called for displaying the self-sacrificing love that he had exemplified when surrendering his life. Accordingly, the giving that was an expression of love would reveal the givers to be persons who obeyed the confession they had made when putting their faith in the Son of God. The appreciative recipients of aid would also glorify God because of their fellow believers' "generosity in sharing with them and with all." These recipients would recognize that kindly assistance would not be limited to them but would be extended to all other believers who would come to be in difficult circumstances. (9:13)

Needy believers in Jerusalem would pray for their fellow believers in Achaia from whom they had received the contribution. They would “long” for them as persons having “the surpassing favour of God.” This may be understood to mean that, if they could, the recipients of aid would very much like to see those who had helped them (indicative of a close bond of affection). The loving aid would be the unmistakable evidence that the givers had been granted God’s gracious favour, which favour had prompted the generous giving. (9:14)

The “indescribable gift” of God for which Paul gave thanks doubtless means the gift of his Son, which priceless gift made possible liberation from sin and condemnation. By implication, this gift of love beyond compare should motivate believers to be loving and generous in giving. (9:15; compare John 3:16; 1 John 4:10, 11.)

### Notes:

In verse 4, two forms of the word for “say” (“I say” or “we say”) are found in ancient manuscripts. There are also manuscripts that conclude with the words “of boasting.” The differences are indicated in the italicized portion of the literal rendering that follows, “If perhaps Macedonians should come with me and find you unprepared, we should be shamed, so that *I [we] may not be saying* you [would be shamed], in this *assurance [of boasting].*” )

In verse 7, the extant Septuagint text of Proverbs 22:8 contains some of the words that Paul quoted. Part of this verse reads, “The cheerful and generous man God blesses, but the vanity of his works he will terminate.” These words are not found in the Masoretic Text.

In verse 13, the Greek text is not as explicit as would appear from the renderings of modern translations. The addition of words has at times resulted in representing Paul as expressing very different thoughts. “Through the testing of this ministry you glorify God by your obedience to the confession of the gospel of Christ and by the generosity of your sharing with them and with all others.” (NRSV) “For with the proof which this aid affords, those who receive it will give honour to God when they see how humbly you obey him and how faithfully you confess the gospel of Christ; and they will thank him for your liberal contribution to their need and to the general good.” (REB) “Because when you have proved your quality by this help, they will give glory to God for the obedience which you show in professing the gospel of Christ, as well as for the generosity of your fellowship towards them and towards all.” (NJB) “The way in which you have proved yourselves by this service will bring honour and praise to God. You believed the message about Christ, and you obeyed it by

sharing generously with God's people and with everyone else." (CEV) "Moreover, your very giving proves the reality of your faith, and that means that men thank God that you practice the Gospel that you profess to believe in, as well as for the actual gifts you make to them and to others." (J. B. Phillips)

## **2 Corinthians 10:1-18**

### **10. The glory of the ministry defended – commended by the Lord**

#### **Verses 1-6. The minister commended by his attitude**

Starting with a solemn, "I myself, Paul," the apostle appealed to the Corinthians with "the mildness and kindness of Christ" (the gentle and kindly, forbearing, or humane spirit that the Son of God manifests). He did not issue commands but entreated them as a loving brother. It appears that he referred to himself in the language of his detractors when he spoke of himself as being humble or lowly while with the Corinthians but bold toward them when absent. (10:1; compare verse 10.)

Paul did not want to be bold toward the Corinthians, making them feel the full weight of his apostolic authority as one who administered severe discipline. So he entreated them to take the required action so that he would not need to use boldness or to assume an authoritative bearing toward those who regarded him as "walking according to the flesh," or as conducting himself and handling matters as would one who is governed by human weakness and flawed human standards. Although Paul had confidence in his being bold and considered acting daringly (not holding anything back) when dealing with his detractors, his desire was that the Corinthians would take corrective measures so that this would not be necessary. (10:2)

From the standpoint of being subject to human weaknesses and living as a human, Paul could speak of himself (and also of his fellow workers) as "walking in the flesh." The warfare that he waged against error and its proponents, however, did not prove to be of a fleshly kind. It was not characterized by the weaknesses or flaws of fallen human nature. (10:3)

The weapons used in this conflict also were not fleshly, not being flawed and weak. These implements are described as being "powerful to God." This could mean that they are powerful from God's standpoint, that their power comes from him, or that they are powerful in advancing his cause. They serve to break down "strongholds," which strongholds could denote the kind of error that has become strongly entrenched. (10:4)

In waging spiritual warfare, Paul demolished the “reasonings,” views, or opinions that conflicted with God’s ways, exposing them as worthless and injurious. All that is “high” and raised up “against the knowledge of God” could apply to everything that defiant humans and the powers of darkness have exalted as a bulwark against what God has revealed to be his will and purpose. In other letters, Paul mentioned the “doctrines of demons” (1 Timothy 4:1) and the conflict believers have with the powers of darkness. (Ephesians 6:12) Communities of believers were not immune to the introduction of corrupting influences and ideas, requiring defensive action. The apostle fought hard to triumph over all wrong thoughts, reducing them to the helpless state of captives in subjection to Christ. These thoughts would be obedient to Christ in the sense that they, like bound captives, would be deprived of all power to do harm. (10:5)

Those who were responsible for introducing pernicious error among believers could not be allowed to continue exerting their corrupt influence. The apostle told the Corinthians that he was prepared to punish every disobedience, taking action once the obedience of the community of believers proved to be complete. Paul must have been confident that the majority of the Corinthians would demonstrate themselves to be fully submissive to God’s ways, requiring that he undertake punitive action only against those who presumptuously exalted their own views above the truth God had revealed through his Son. (10:6)

### **Verses 7-11; The minister commended by his authority**

A literal reading of the apostle’s next words is, “Look at things according to the face.” This could mean that Paul wanted the Corinthians to look at matters in the correct light or as things really were. (10:7) Translators have variously rendered the expression. “Look at what is before your eyes.” (NRSV) “Look at what confronts you.” (NAB) “You must look at the facts before you.” (NCV) “Look facts in the face.” (REB) “You judge by appearances.” (CEV) “Take a close look at yourselves.” (CEV, footnote)

The person who “trusts in himself” that he is “of Christ” or belongs to him would be one who displays an arrogant spirit that is focused on self. (Compare Luke 18:9.) A number of manuscripts refer to the individual as trusting in himself to be Christ’s “servant.” Paul admonished anyone who thus trusted in himself to think again and then added what he should consider, “As he [belongs to] Christ, so also [do] we” (meaning the apostle). No believer had any basis for assuming a proud attitude as if he were the only one who belonged to Christ. (10:7)

To some it may have appeared that Paul boasted somewhat too much about the authority the Lord Jesus Christ had granted him for the purpose of building up and not for tearing down. By acknowledging this aspect about boasting, the apostle would have implied that he was not in any way inferior to those who trusted in themselves as belonging to Christ. Paul had been divinely called to be an apostle, and his commission included strengthening those who had responded in faith to his proclamation of the message about the Son of God. In relation to the community of believers, Paul's assigned role was constructive, helping all to grow in faith and not to have their faith undermined. The authority Christ had given him was not of a destructive nature. Paul could say that he was not ashamed of his boasting, for he was no impostor or one who made exaggerated claims about himself and his accomplishments. (10:8)

Based on his apostolic authority, he expressed himself strongly in his letters, but these letters were not meant to frighten the recipients. The ultimate purpose of Paul's letters would have been to promote the spiritual well-being of believers and not to make them afraid and thereby to tear them down. (10:9)

His detractors claimed that his letters were "weighty and strong" (expressed in an impressive and forceful manner) but that his "bodily presence" proved to be "weak" and his "speech contemptible." In their estimation, Paul did not amount to anything when it came to his personal bearing, and his speaking lacked eloquence. (10:10)

The apostle warned those who evaluated him in this contemptuous manner, telling them to consider that what he proved to be in his letters while absent he would also be in deed when personally present. (10:11)

### **Verses 12-18. The minister commended by the Lord**

While looking down on Paul, his detractors rated themselves highly. With apparent reference to some who had an exalted opinion of themselves, he (using the editorial first person plural) spoke of not daring to place himself among them or to compare himself with those who recommended themselves. These individuals measured themselves by themselves and compared themselves with themselves. Their standard for evaluation originated with themselves, and they deemed themselves to be important on the basis of their personal view. This was a faulty measure of true worth, and Paul rightly identified those who rated themselves highly on this basis as knowing nothing. (10:12)

When boasting in the manner that he did, the apostle, unlike his detractors, did not do so beyond measure, exceeding the limit of what he could rightfully claim.

Instead, he kept to the measure of “the [measuring] reed” that God had apportioned to him for “measure,” and that measure also reached as far as the Corinthians. The divinely assigned measure appears to designate the apportioned field of operation for Paul as an apostle to the nations. Within this field he labored, and his boasting did not extend beyond the limits of that field. (10:13; see the Notes section.)

Upon coming to Corinth to declare the “evangel of Christ,” Paul had not overreached himself or exceeded his limits as would one who entered someone else’s domain. He was first in proclaiming the good news about the Son of God to the Corinthians and others in the Roman province of Achaia. (10:14)

The apostle did not boast beyond measure “in the labors of others.” He did not arrive in Achaia after the message about Christ had already been proclaimed there and communities of believers had come into existence. Unlike his detractors who came later, he did not boastfully elevate his role beyond what had already been accomplished. But Paul hoped that, as the faith of the Corinthians increased, he would be “magnified among [them] according to our [measuring] reed for abundance.” Increase in the faith of the Corinthians likely refers to the development of a stronger faith. Upon coming to have the desirable measure of faith, the community of believers in Corinth would not have needed the apostle’s special attention, making it possible for him to direct his efforts in proclaiming the message about Christ in more distant regions. (10:15)

His being “magnified” among the Corinthians could mean that they would come to regard him more highly than they had previously. His detractors had cast him in a bad light, and this appears to have affected how a significant number of the believers in Corinth came to view him. If the reference is to his being magnified among the Corinthians, their much higher regard would have been “according to our [measuring] reed for abundance.” So, although abundant in comparison with the former view of him, this higher regard would be within the proper limits. Another possibility is that the “[measuring] reed” could designate Paul’s field of operation, and that he hoped his sphere of labor would be greatly enlarged among the Corinthians. In view of the apostle’s goal to go where the good news about Christ had not as yet been proclaimed, it seems less likely that the meaning would relate to increased activity among the believers in Achaia. On the other hand, their proper view of Paul did have a bearing on their spiritual well-being, for he, as a divinely appointed apostle, had faithfully discharged his commission. (10:15)

The apostle desired to reach areas where the glad tidings about Christ had not been made known, and this would have been in regions beyond Achaia. He

would then not be boasting in the “[measuring] reed” of others or in their field of operation. Paul would not be making any claims respecting regions where things had already been prepared or where communities of believers had already come into existence through the labours of others. (10:16)

Paul’s “boasting,” however, was not an inordinate pride based on personal accomplishments. He labored faithfully as a servant of Christ and followed his direction. So the apostle’s boasting was in Christ as his Lord or as a believer who was at one with him and to whom he gave the credit for what he was able to accomplish. Drawing on words found in Jeremiah 9:24, Paul said, “But let the one boasting boast in the Lord.” The apostle did not introduce the words as being a quotation from the holy writings, and they are not the exact words found in Jeremiah 9:24, where the reference is to boasting in knowing YHWH or having a relationship with him. Therefore, it is likely that Jesus Christ is the Lord to whom Paul referred. Believers acknowledge God and Christ in everything they are able to do, and so either one could be understood as designating the Lord in whom they would rightly boast. (10:17)

It is the Lord Jesus Christ whom his Father has appointed as judge, and believers will be called upon to render an account to him. (Acts 17:31; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 2 Timothy 4:1) Therefore, the manner in which individuals recommend themselves (as did Paul’s detractors) did not count. The approved person is the one whom the Lord Jesus Christ recommends or considers faithful. (10:18)

### **Notes:**

In this chapter (as elsewhere in 2 Corinthians), the first person plural pronouns and verbs are to be understood in an editorial sense as applying to Paul.

For verse 13, the renderings of modern translations are often more explicit than the literal reading of the difficult Greek text (“But we shall not boast [with reference] to unmeasured things, but according to the measure of the [measuring] reed which God apportioned to us by measure, to come also [as far as] you” ). The result has been a considerable variety in the way Paul’s words are interpreted. “We, however, will not boast beyond limits, but will keep within the field that God has assigned to us, to reach out even as far as you.” (NRSV) “But we will not boast beyond measure but will keep to the limits God has apportioned us, namely, to reach even to you.” (NAB) “By contrast we do not intend to boast beyond measure, but will measure ourselves by the standard which God laid down for us, namely that of having come all the way to you.” (NJB) “We won’t brag about something we don’t have a right to brag about. We will only brag about the work that God has sent us to do, and you are part of that

work.” (CEV) “But we will not brag about things outside the work that was given us to do. We will limit our bragging to the work that God gave us, and this includes our work with you.” (NCV) “No, we shall not make any wild claims, but simply judge ourselves by that line of duty which God has marked out for us, and that line includes our work on your behalf.” (J. B. Phillips) “As for us, our boasting will not go beyond the proper limits; and our sphere is determined by the limit God laid down for us, which permitted us to come as far as Corinth.” (REB)

As in the case of verse 13, the words of verse 15 regarding Paul’s hope have been variously translated, conveying a variety of different meanings. “Our hope is rather that, as your faith grows, we may attain a position among you greater than ever before, but still within the limits of our sphere.” (REB) “But our hope is that, as your faith increases, our sphere of action among you may be greatly enlarged.” (NRSV) “Yet our hope is that, as your faith increases, our influence among you may be greatly enlarged, within our proper limits.” (NAB) “Our hope is that your growing faith will mean the expansion of our sphere of action.” (J. B. Phillips) “We hope, as your faith increases, to grow greater and greater by this standard of ours.” (NJB) “We are trusting, when your faith has developed, to grow further in your esteem and to continue to grow according to the standard allotted to us.” (NJB, footnote) “We hope that as your faith continues to grow, you will help our work to grow much larger.” (NCV) “But I hope that as you become stronger in your faith, we will be able to reach many more of the people around you.” (CEV)

## **2 Corinthians 11: 1-33**

### **11:1-15. The glory of the ministry defended by sincerity attested in service**

#### **Verses 1-6. The sincere motives of service**

Paul regarded boasting about himself or his accomplishments as foolish. In their boasting, his detractors had demeaned him. For this reason, the apostle decided to do some boasting of his own and so asked the Corinthians to put up with some senselessness from him, adding that he desired that they bear with him. The Greek text could also be understood to mean that they were already putting up with the apostle. (11:1)

Both meanings are found in modern translations. “I wish you would bear with me in a little foolishness. Do bear with me!” (NRSV) “If only you would put up with a little foolishness from me! Please put up with me.” (NAB) “I should like



you to bear with me in a little foolishness; please bear with me.” (REB) “I hope you will put up with a little of my foolishness; but you are already doing that.” (NIV). “I wish you would be patient with me even when I am a little foolish, but you are already doing that.” (NCV) “I wish you would put up with a little foolishness from me—not that you don’t do this already.” (NJB)

Corrupt individuals posed a threat to the spiritual well-being of the community of believers in Corinth and likely also to that of believers elsewhere in the Roman province of Achaia. The apostle had jealous concern for them. He had promised them to one husband, Christ. In his godly jealousy for believers, Paul wanted to be able to present them as a chaste virgin to the Son of God or in an undefiled state as persons who would be acceptable to him as members of his bride. (11:2)

Paul feared that, as the serpent had cunningly seduced Eve, believers in Achaia might have their minds corrupted, being led astray from the “sincerity and chastity” that they should be maintaining for Christ. In the case of Eve, her falling victim to the serpent, the devil’s instrument, resulted in the loss of her good relationship with God and eventually led to her death. For the Corinthians to have had their minds corrupted could have led to the loss of their approved relationship as God’s beloved children and their place as members of Christ’s bride. This would have been the greatest loss imaginable. (11:3; see the Notes section.)

The apostle had grave concern for the Corinthians, as they had shown themselves to be amenable to destructive influences. If someone proclaimed a Christ other than the one whom Paul had made known to them, they were willing to listen. They did not reject a presentation of Christ that deviated from the truth. The Corinthians had received God’s spirit, and yet they were receptive to an opposing spirit (an impelling influence that did not promote purity in thought, word, and deed through a transformation of the inner self). They had responded to the evangel or the message about the Son of God and how an approved standing with his Father resulted from faith in what he accomplished by laying down his life in sacrifice. Nevertheless, when someone came with another evangel, one that contradicted what they had accepted, they readily put up with it and the individual. (11:4)

Identifying those responsible for introducing error, Paul referred to them ironically as “super apostles,” stating that he considered himself in no way inferior to them. (11:5) If it could be said that Paul lacked polish or eloquence in his speaking, he was not deficient in knowledge. The Corinthians and others in

Achaia had all the needed evidence that he fully knew the vital message about God and Christ. (11:6)

### **Verses 7-11. The rewards of sincere service.**

Those who disparaged Paul appear to have pointed to his not receiving support from believers in Achaia while labouring in their midst and suggested that his ministry had little worth. This apparently prompted the apostle to ask whether he had sinned when humbling himself in order to exalt the Corinthians and others. He had elevated believers, labouring as their servant without relying on any contributions from them. Without charge, he had declared the “evangel of God” (the message about Christ that had God as its ultimate source). (11:7)

Paul had “robbed” other congregations, accepting contributions from them while serving the Corinthians. He spoke of robbing these other congregations because, at the time, they were not benefiting from his labours and so were not receiving anything for their kind help. (11:8)

When he came to be in need while in Achaia, the apostle did not become a burden to any of the believers there. “Brothers” (or fellow believers) from the neighbouring province of Macedonia arrived with a contribution to assist him. So, although he proved to be in need, he did not become a burden to anyone in Corinth and determined never to become such in the future. (11:9)

Paul took rightful pride in his having laboured without receiving financial support. He solemnly declared, by the “truth of Christ in [him],” that he would not let this reason for boasting be taken from him in the regions of Achaia. The “truth of Christ” refers to the deposit of the full revelation about God’s Son. Paul, as a divinely chosen vessel, had this deposit within him. (11:10)

Regarding his not permitting anything to deprive him of his boast about serving without cost to anyone, he asked, “Why [is] this? Because I do not love you? God knows [I do].” Paul’s unselfish service in Achaia confirmed his deep love for believers in Corinth, and God was his witness. (11:11)

### **Verses 12-15. The counterfeits of sincere service**

As to financial support, the apostle determined to handle matters as he had in the past. Thereby he put an end to the pretext of those who, in keeping with their boastful claims, wanted a pretext for being recognized as equal to the apostle. Unlike Paul, they, however, did seek personal gain. (11:12)

The apostle then strongly denounced the arrogant pretenders, calling them “false apostles,” “deceitful workers,” and persons who transformed themselves into “apostles of Christ,” falsely claiming to be men sent forth in Christ’s service. Unlike Paul, they were not divinely commissioned, and their actions proved to be spiritually harmful to those who yielded to their influence. (11:13)

That such sham apostles existed should not have astonished believers. The ultimate deceiver, Satan, disguises himself as an “angel of light.” In the case of Eve, for example, the message the adversary conveyed through the serpent represented the death-dealing lie as enlightenment and as something from which she could greatly benefit. (11:14) So there is nothing “great” or beyond expectation for Satan’s servants to disguise themselves as “servants of righteousness,” falsely representing themselves as advancing the cause of truth and right. Their end, or the adverse judgment to be expressed against them, would be in accord with what their corrupt works merit. (11:15)

### **11:16-33. The glory of the ministry defended by sincerity attested by suffering**

#### **Verses 16-23a. Paul answers his critics**

Again Paul said, as he did previously when stating that he did not lack in knowledge (11:6), “Let no one consider me to be senseless.” But if there were those who did think so, he would permit them to accept him as a fool in order for him to do a little boasting. (11:16)

The Son of God never boasted about himself but gave his Father credit for everything he said and did. So Paul could say that his speaking was not according to the Lord’s speaking, but a speaking in senselessness, a speaking that is characteristic of self-assured boasting or bragging. (11:17)

Many others, primarily Paul’s detractors, boasted “according to the flesh,” or from the standpoint of outward appearances that impressed fellow humans. For this reason, the apostle also decided to boast. His boasting, though, served to expose the emptiness of the bragging of those who demeaned him and his faithful service. (11:18)

The apostle implied that the Corinthians would be quite willing to tolerate his resorting to senseless bragging, using irony when telling them that they were pleased to put up with fools because they themselves were wise. (11:19) It appears that the false apostles assumed the arrogant bearing of abusive masters. Yet the Corinthians submitted to their mistreatment. They put up with whoever

enslaved them, preyed on them, exploited them, elevated themselves above them, or slapped them in the face. (11:20)

Paul, on the other hand, had conducted himself as a lowly servant. Therefore, he, “according to shame,” spoke of having been weak. In relation to having been weak, this could mean that Paul represented himself as being ashamed of being too weak to act in the abusive manner of the false apostles. Another possibility is that the Corinthians should have been ashamed. Translators have variously rendered the Greek text to make it more explicit. “To my shame I say that we were too weak!” (NAB) “To my shame, I must say, we were too weak for that [resorting to the abusive ways of the false apostles]!” (NRSV) “I am ashamed to say that we are too weak to behave in such a way.” (CEV) “And you call me a weakling! I admit the reproach.” (REB) “It is shameful to me to say this, but we were too ‘weak’ to do those things to you!” (NCV) “I am almost ashamed to say that I never did brave strong things like that to you.” (J. B. Phillips) “I say it to your shame; perhaps we have been too weak.” (NJB) Paul’s apparent objective was to help the Corinthians to come to their senses and to recognize their folly in having exalted those who abused them while looking down on Paul for conducting himself as a caring servant and treating them in a loving manner. (11:21)

In their bearing, words, and actions, the false apostles had been bold or daring. In response to their daring and the baneful effect it had exerted on the community of believers in Corinth, Paul determined to talk like a senseless person, like a person who is daring. As the context reveals, the apostle manifested his daring or boldness by resorting to boasting. (11:22)

The aspects on which he initially focused reveal that the false apostles were Jews who took pride in their heritage. Paul, in his “boasting,” made it clear that he was not inferior to them. “Are they Hebrews? I [am] also. Are they Israelites? I [am] also. Are they of the seed of Abraham? I [am] also.” Both on his father’s and his mother’s side, he was a Hebrew, an Israelite (having Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel, as his ancestor), and a descendant of Abraham the Hebrew through his great-grandson Benjamin. (11:22; Philippians 3:4, 5)

### **Verses 23b-33. Paul cites his sufferings to prove his sincerity**

Paul continued his boasting, “Are they servants of Christ? I speak as one deranged, I am more so.” He then backed up his words about being a servant of the Son of God to a far greater degree than any his detractors were. The proof consisted of what he had faced when making known the glad tidings about Christ. Paul’s abundant labors included everything he did to help others to learn

about the Son of God and to assist fellow believers to maintain and grow in faith. Additionally, he worked with his hands to care for his personal needs. The opposition to his labors in the cause of Christ led to his being imprisoned more often than others. With greater frequency and probably also greater severity than any other believers, he was subjected to flogging. In view of the perils he encountered, he found himself many times near death. (11:23)

The Mosaic law limited the administration of beatings to 40 strokes. (Deuteronomy 25:2, 3) To prevent possibly exceeding the upper limit and thereby violating the law, the Jews restricted the number of strokes to 39. On five different occasions, the Jews beat Paul 39 times. (11:24)

Three different times, non-Jewish authorities ordered the apostle to be beaten with rods. One instance of this occurred in Philippi. He and his companion Silas had their clothes stripped off and were then severely beaten with rods, leaving open wounds on their bodies. (11:25; Acts 16:22, 23, 33)

The one stoning to which Paul referred took place in Lystra. Jewish opposers arrived from Iconium and Pisidian Antioch and succeeded in inciting the non-Jewish populace against him. The enraged mob stoned him and dragged his body outside the city, thinking that he was dead. When the grieving believers surrounded him, he got up and entered Lystra, leaving with Barnabas on the next day. (11:25; Acts 14:19, 20)

In the course of three of his sea voyages, Paul experienced shipwreck. In the case of one of these three instances, he must have spent “a night and a day in the deep,” likely clinging to pieces of wreckage from the ship until he was rescued or able to swim to shore when the sea became calmer. (11:25)

Often Paul was on the road, traveling from one location to another to proclaim the message about Christ or to visit communities of believers to encourage and strengthen them in the faith. During his extensive travels, he had to make his way across flooded rivers. Besides the dangers rivers posed, the apostle faced dangers from robbers who preyed on passing travelers, dangers from fellow Jews (people of his own race) who were hostile to his activity, and dangers from non-Jews who rejected and opposed his proclamation about Christ. There were dangers in the cities from lawless elements of society, and dangers in the wilderness or unpopulated areas where water might be difficult to obtain, where no protection from the elements existed, or where a chance encounter with a large wild animal could be hazardous. Storms made his sea travels perilous. Particularly distressing to him must have been the dangers he encountered from

false brothers who endeavored to undermine his efforts and may even have stirred up unbelievers against him. (11:26)

Paul worked hard and exerted himself strenuously. Often he went without sleep. He experienced hunger and thirst, fasted frequently, and endured biting cold while insufficiently clothed. (11:27)

Apart from the hardships of an external nature, he daily found himself in a state of inward concern and anxious care for all the communities of believers. These included congregations in cities where he had personally labored and those about whom he periodically received news from fellow believers. (11:28)

After enumerating the many perils he had endured, Paul raised the questions, “Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is stumbled, and I am not indignant [literally, ‘I do not burn’]?” In view of all that had befallen him, he was very much aware of his weakness or frailty. Without divine help, he could not have endured. So he could sympathize with those who were weak or painfully aware of their limitations or their helpless state. It greatly troubled Paul when a believer made himself responsible for stumbling a fellow believer or for leading him into sin. Such stumbling could have resulted from a failure to take into consideration the weak conscience of another believer, insisting on a right instead of foregoing the right out of loving regard for the scruples of the fellow believer. The weaker believer could thus have been emboldened to act in a manner that proved to be sinful for him. Any failure to show love can have an injurious effect on the spiritual welfare of others, and can be especially damaging to fragile faith. Paul’s indignation would have been directed at those who had caused the stumbling, whereas he would feel deeply for those who had callously been led into sin. (11:29)

If there was to be any boasting from him, the only kind in which Paul would engage related to his weakness. It would involve matters that revealed him to be a lowly servant of Christ who endured trials and hardships but did not do so in his own strength. (11:30) He called upon the “God and Father of the Lord Jesus” as his witness to his limiting all boasting to his personal weakness. Paul acknowledged God as the one who “knows,” and so from whom nothing is concealed. After making his prayerful expression that God be blessed or praised forever, the apostle solemnly declared, “I do not lie.” The God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ was his witness to the truth of his words. (11:31)

Paul then referred to an incident early in his life after his encounter with the risen Lord Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus. The incident illustrated his personal weakness or helplessness in the face of grave danger. In their desire to

kill him, hostile unbelieving Jews appear to have gained the support of a high official (an ethnarch) who was subject to King Aretas. All egress from the walled city was blocked, with the gates being watched day and night. Under the cover of darkness, Paul's disciples (possibly those whom he had aided to become believers) had him positioned in a large basket and lowered him from a window down the outside of the city wall, making it possible for him to escape. (11:32, 33; Acts 9:23-25)

### Notes:

As elsewhere in 2 Corinthians, the change from first person plural pronouns and verbs to first person singular pronouns and verbs in this chapter does not appear to be significant. Consistency is not to be expected in a dictated letter, and the first person plural pronouns and verbs function as an editorial "we" and usually have the same significance as the first person singular pronouns and verbs. At times, Paul may have meant to include his close associates, but this often cannot be established from the context.

In verse 3, the Greek words for "and chastity" are missing in numerous manuscripts.

In verse 29, the Greek term for "burn" (*pyróo*) is commonly understood to mean "burn with indignation," Paul's indignation being directed against the one responsible for causing a fellow believer to sin. There is a possibility, however, that the term "burn" relates to the internal upheaval Paul felt for the one who was stumbled. So the meaning could be that, within himself, the apostle burned with pain for the stumbled individual. Another significance could be that Paul burned with a consuming longing to restore the one who had been caused to sin.

Aretas may have been a dynastic name, for a number of Nabataean (Arabian) kings bore that name. To differentiate the various rulers, the Aretas (mentioned in verse 32) is referred to as Aretas IV. He ruled from about 9 BCE to about 39 CE.

In verse 32, many manuscripts represent the ethnarch as "wanting" to seize Paul. A number of other manuscripts omit the Greek word for "wanting."

## **2 Corinthians 12:1-21**

### **12:1-10. The glory of the ministry defended by experience of God's dealing.**

#### **Verses 1-6. The experience of God's glory**

Manuscript readings for the opening words of verse 1 vary. Many manuscripts, including P46 (about 200 CE), read, "Boasting is necessary." Others say, "but boasting," "if boasting is necessary," or "boasting indeed." Based on the oldest extant manuscript evidence, Paul may be understood as saying that he had been forced to boast because of the arrogant claims the false apostles had made. So, with his own boasting, he intended to expose them as having nothing to brag about when compared to him. Nevertheless, he recognized that such boasting was not beneficial, for it provided no proof of genuine apostleship and did not reflect Christ's example. Neither the one doing the bragging nor the community of believers that heard the bragging would have gained anything of value from it. (12:1)

To establish credibility as God's highly favoured ones, the false apostles may have boasted about the visions they had received. This may explain why the apostle went on "to visions and revelations of the Lord." The manner in which he did so differed from that of his detractors. (12:1)

Paul earlier indicated that he would only boast about matters relating to his weakness or helplessness (11:30), but boasting about personal visions and revelations that had come from the Lord Jesus Christ would not have pertained to his weakness. Possibly for this reason, he distanced himself from the extraordinary vision he next mentioned, speaking about it in the third person singular (not the first person singular) and stressing his ignorance regarding the manner in which it occurred. The apostle spoke of knowing a "man in Christ" (a man at one with the Son of God as a member of his body) who was caught up to the "third heaven." This had taken place fourteen years before the apostle wrote this letter to the Corinthians. Paul mentioned that he did not know whether this "man's" being taken to the third heaven occurred while he was "in the body" or "out of the body," adding, "God knows." This suggests that the experience proved to be so real that Paul had no idea just how it happened. The "third heaven" likely is to be understood to denote the highest heaven, the location where God and his Son are. (12:2)



The apostle repeated the point about knowing such a man but his not knowing whether the transfer to the third heaven took place in or out of the body. Again the apostle acknowledged, “God knows.” (12:3)

The paradise Paul mentioned must be a heavenly one, for the designation “paradise” parallels the expression “third heaven” and is used in the identical context. The unutterable words that a man could not lawfully speak probably refer to a personal revelation, possibly one that served to strengthen Paul for the trials and hardships he would face when carrying out his commission as an apostle to the non-Jewish peoples. The content of what had been disclosed to Paul was unutterable in that it was not to be made known to others. Something similar is mentioned in Revelation (10:4), where the directive is given not to write down the utterances of the seven thunders. (12:4; see the Notes section regarding “third heaven” and “paradise.”)

Continuing to distance himself from the extraordinary experience and not using it as a basis for personal boasting, Paul said that he would boast about the man who was caught up to the third heaven but would not boast about himself, with the exception of his own weaknesses. It had not been on account of personal merit that Paul had been granted the special revelation that he had mentioned, and so he refused to boast regarding it in a manner that would have called attention to himself and exalted him in the eyes of others. For proof about his being a divinely commissioned apostle, he called attention to his weaknesses, which weaknesses revealed that God and Christ were granting him the strength to endure. Instead of elevating himself, he honoured God and Christ, acknowledging his helplessness and his need for divine aid. (12:5)

Paul could have boasted about matters other than his weaknesses. If he had ever wanted to do so, he would not have resorted to exaggerated or unfounded claims that would have exposed him to be without good sense. He would have spoken the truth without any embellishments. Nevertheless, the apostle chose not to boast, not wanting others to attribute more to him than what they could personally see in him and hear from him as he carried out his apostolic commission. (12:6)

### **Verses 7-10. The experience of God’s testing.**

While acknowledging that he had received extraordinary revelations, he did not call attention to these to promote himself or to have others elevate him on that basis. (12:7)

Paul was aware that his having been granted surpassingly great revelations could have made him proud. He mentioned having been given a “thorn in the flesh” that kept any feelings of superiority in check. Paul personified this “thorn” as an “angel,” messenger, or agent of Satan, which struck or tormented him. The apostle saw in the “thorn” the restraining factor that kept him from becoming too exalted. (12:7; see the Notes section.)

Based on the context, there is no way to determine the nature of Paul’s “thorn in the flesh.” It could have been a physical affliction or the trouble his detractors continued to make for him. Whatever he had to bear in the flesh or his physical organism proved to be very trying. His distress was comparable to his being submitted to relentless beating. (12:7)

Paul three times appealed to the Lord Jesus Christ to be relieved of the “thorn.” Understandably, the apostle directed his entreaties to the Lord, for he endured the afflicted state while in his service. Furthermore, the revelations Jesus Christ granted the apostle made it possible for him to make his appeals in a very personal way. (12:8)

It must have been during the course of the revelations that Paul heard the Lord’s response that his gracious favour was sufficient for him. Explaining why the thorn would not be taken away, the Lord added, “For [my] power is made complete in weakness.” Through human weakness, frailty, or helplessness, Jesus Christ would reveal his power in a complete sense, for his cause would be advanced and would triumph even though the human instruments being used were in themselves weak like fragile earthen pots. (12:9)

In view of the Lord’s response, Paul found delight in submitting to his will and most gladly chose to boast in weaknesses rather than to continue asking for the “thorn” to be removed. His focus on his weaknesses would make it possible for the “power of Christ” to reside with him or, according to another rendering of the Greek text, “tent over [him].” Christ’s power would be manifested as being at work in him, enabling him to accomplish what would have been impossible on account of the limitations his weaknesses imposed. (12:9)

The weaknesses included all the factors that made the carrying out of his commission as an apostle difficult. For Christ and what he enabled him to do, Paul was content to bear his weaknesses. These included “insults” (malicious attacks and slander by detractors), “necessities” (hardships or times when he found himself suffering want), “persecutions” (being hounded by hostile unbelievers who violently attacked him or attempted to kill him), and “straits”

(distress and affliction of various kinds). While Paul appeared weak or helpless, he proved to be powerful on account of what Christ did for him. (12:10)

### **12:11-21. The glory of the ministry defended by experience of effective service**

#### **Verses 11-12. Ministry for Christ is to be effective for Christ.**

By resorting to boasting, the apostle had become as a person without good sense or reason. The Corinthians had forced him to do so, for they had not come to his defence when his detractors demeaned him. They should have commended him, for in no way had he been inferior to the “super apostles” who spoke against him. Even if Paul was “nothing” (either meaning that if the Corinthians considered him as a nobody or that he was nothing apart from the gracious divine favour he had been granted), he, in relation to the detractors, was not inferior in a single respect. (12:11)

While he had been with them, the Corinthians witnessed the workings of the signs of an apostle among them. These signs were performed “in all patience” or “endurance,” indicating that the working of divine power was evident while Paul experienced and endured distress patiently. The Corinthians saw signs, wonders, and mighty deeds. Paul did not choose to provide details about these manifestations that verified his having divine backing, for the Corinthians knew what he meant. (12:12)

#### **Verses 13-19. Effective service excels in helping others**

He then raised a question that should have jolted them to their senses. “For in what [way] were you made less than the rest of the congregations, except that I did not burden you? Forgive me this wrong.” It would have been inconceivable for them to think Paul had wronged them by not being a financial burden to them. There was nothing for which they needed to forgive the apostle, for he had not treated the Corinthian congregation as being inferior to other communities of believers among whom he had laboured. (12:13)

At this point, Paul directed attention to his planned visit. “Look! This is [the] third [time] I am ready to come to you, and I will not be a burden.” His words are often understood to mean that he had twice before been in Corinth, the first visit being when the community of believers came into existence and the second one being the painful visit that is not mentioned in the book of Acts but is interpreted to have been referred to in 2 Corinthians 2:1. Another possibility is that this was the third time Paul had made preparations to return to Corinth, but circumstances prevented him from making the two previously planned visits.

Whereas the Corinthians knew what he meant, we today cannot be certain, and the exact significance of his words have no real relevance for us. (12:14)

As had been the case while he had been in Corinth before, the apostle determined not to be a burden to the community of believers but intended to take care of his own needs. “For,” as he explained, he did not seek what belonged to them, but he did seek the Corinthians, expending himself in efforts to further their spiritual well-being. This was in keeping with the principle that children are not the ones who make provision for their parents but that parents are the ones who make provision for their children. (12:14) Through Paul’s labors in the service of Christ, the Corinthians had become believers and, in that sense, the apostle had become their father, and they were as children to him for whom he had deep love and concern. (1 Corinthians 4:15)

In view of his great love for the Corinthians, he most gladly was willing to spend himself and to be completely spent for them (for their “souls”). Paul would not spare himself in any way in doing what he could to further their spiritual welfare. He then asked them, “If I love you more, should I be loved less?” It would have been a serious flaw for the Corinthians to love the apostle less because he loved them so much as to sacrifice himself fully for them. (12:15)

Although Paul had cared for his own needs, not burdening the Corinthians, there were those among them who maintained that he was crafty and had deceitfully trapped them. The “super apostles” must have been responsible for undermining Paul’s faithful service, creating doubt and suspicion about him. Whenever possible, they must have tried putting an evil construction on everything he did and said. They may have asserted that he cleverly refused to avail himself of financial support in order to profit from believers in another way. Possibly the “super apostles” suggested that Paul would use part of the contributed funds for the poor believers in Jerusalem for his own purposes. (12:16)

With pointed questions, the apostle reminded the Corinthians that he had not exploited them through anyone whom he had sent to them. He had urged Titus to go to Corinth and had sent another brother with him. “Did Titus,” Paul asked, “exploit you? Did we [Titus and I] not walk in the same spirit? [Did we] not [follow in] the same footsteps?” The Corinthians knew that Titus had not taken advantage of them. In “spirit,” disposition, or attitude, he did not differ from Paul. Like the apostle, he proved to be no burden to them. His conduct matched the apostle’s footsteps. (12:17, 18; see the Notes section.)

Paul's words may have prompted some to conclude that he was defending himself. Anticipating this faulty reasoning, he said, "Have you been thinking all this time that we are defending ourselves before you?" Stressing that this was not his objective, the apostle continued, "Before God in Christ we are speaking. Everything, however, beloved ones, is for your upbuilding." (12:19)

**Verses 20-21. Effective service warns against sin.**

For Paul, it was not a matter of personal defence or vindication. He recognized himself as speaking before God "in Christ" or as a believer in a relationship of oneness with the Son of God as a member of his body, and he looked to God as the one who judges all matters aright. All that the apostle had done and said served for the spiritual upbuilding of the Corinthians, for his words and deeds were motivated by deep love for them and an earnest desire to help them to be found divinely approved. It would have been spiritually injurious for any of them to continue entertaining a twisted view of a genuine apostle and one whose exemplary conduct revealed him to be a faithful servant of God and Christ. Misrepresenting Paul would also have meant misrepresenting God and Christ, for the apostle faithfully imitated them in word and action. (12:19)

In view of the undesirable developments that had come to Paul's attention, he feared that, upon his arrival in Corinth, he would find the believers there in a condition he did not wish and that they would find him to be as they would not desire. Instead of seeing a united community of believers that genuinely cared for one another in a spirit of love, he feared that he would find quarreling or rivalry, jealousy, angry tempers, disputes, cases of defamation or slander, whisperings (instances of defaming others in secret), manifestations of swelled-headedness or conceit, and disorders or improprieties. If his apprehension proved to be warranted, the Corinthians would find Paul not as they wished, for he would be forced to undertake strong disciplinary measures. (12:20)

Paul contemplated the possibility that, upon his arrival in Corinth, God might humiliate him among the believers there and that he would have to grieve over those who had previously sinned but had not repented of their unclean practices, sexual immorality, and unbridled conduct or unrestrained debauchery. His humiliation would refer to the shame and bitter disappointment he would feel because his earnest efforts to aid the Corinthian believers had not produced the desired results. (12:21; regarding how the Greek word for "again" [*pálin*] can affect the meaning of the verse, see the Notes section.)

## Notes:

Chapter 8 of the apocryphal work known as 2 Enoch or the Slavonic Enoch (possibly dating from the late first century CE), represents paradise as being in the third heaven. Another apocryphal work (frequently conjectured to have originated in the first century CE), known as the Apocalypse of Moses, does also. “The Father of all, sitting on his holy throne, stretched out his hand, and took Adam and handed him over to the archangel Michael, saying: ‘Lift him up into paradise unto the third heaven.’” (37:5) Later (in 40:2), there is another mention of “paradise in the third heaven.”

In verse 7, the concluding words about becoming too exalted are missing in a number of ancient manuscripts, but do have the support of the oldest extant manuscript (P46, c. 200 CE), fourth-century Codex Vaticanus, and numerous other manuscripts.

In connection with “power” (verse 9), numerous ancient manuscripts do not include the pronoun “my” and so could be understood to refer to God’s power. In view of the complete oneness existing between the Son of God and his Father, the reading “power” or “my power” is immaterial to the basic meaning.

In verse 18, some have understood the “spirit” to mean God’s spirit. The reference to the “same footsteps” for Paul and Titus makes it more likely that the spirit denotes the same disposition or attitude.

The phrase “all this time” (in verse 19) is a rendering of the Greek word *pálai*, which term can mean “long ago,” “formerly,” or “already.” There are numerous other manuscripts that say *pálin* (“again”).

The word *pálin* (in verse 21), meaning “again,” can relate either to Paul’s again being in Corinth or to his again being humiliated. This difference is reflected in the renderings of modern translations. “I fear that when I come again my God may humiliate me before you, and I may have to mourn over many of those who sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, immorality, and licentiousness they practiced.” (NAB) “I am afraid that when I come my God may humiliate me again in your presence, that I may have cause to grieve over many who were sinning before and have not repented of their unclean lives, their fornication and sensuality.” (REB) If the reference is to again being humbled, this would lend support to the view that the apostle had previously made a visit that proved to be distressing for him.

## **2 Corinthians 13: 1-13 (14)**

### **13:1-10. The glory of the ministry defended – commended by honesty**

#### **Verses 1-6. Honesty to correct faults**

There is a measure of uncertainty about the meaning of Paul's words, "This [is the] third [time] I am coming to you." Many understand the reference to be to the third time the apostle would be visiting Corinth. There is a possibility, however, that it was the third time Paul had planned to visit the community of believers there, with circumstances having prevented him from going to Corinth as he had previously intended. (13:1)

The statement about the "third time" is followed by a legal principle based on Deuteronomy 19:15, "At the mouth of two or three witnesses every matter must stand." In a legal case, a charge could only be substantiated by the testimony of two or three witnesses. One witness was not enough to establish the validity of a charge. If the legal principle applies to Paul's having then intended for the third time to return to Corinth, it could mean that he thus solemnly declared that he would definitely arrive. Another possibility is that the legal principle served to warn the Corinthians that action would be taken against any who persisted in a sinful course. Believers in Corinth were familiar with Paul's manner of expressing himself and would have had no difficulty in understanding what he meant. We today cannot be certain, but the exact significance of his words does not have the relevance for us that it did for the Corinthians. (13:1)

The meaning of the apostle's next words depend on whether he had been in Corinth on two occasions. A literal reading of the Greek text is, "I have said before and say beforehand, as being present the second [time] and now absent, to those who previously sinned and to all the rest, that, whenever I should come again, I will not spare." This could mean that, when for the second time with the Corinthians, Paul had warned them that he would not be lenient in dealing with those who had not repented of their sinful course; and then, before his planned third visit, he repeated this warning. (13:2)

Numerous modern translations make this significance explicit. "I warned those who sinned previously and all the others, and I warn them now while absent, as I did when present on my second visit, that if I come again, I will not be lenient." (NRSV) "I warned those who sinned earlier and all the others, and I warn them now while absent, as I did when present on my second visit, that if I come again I will not be lenient." (NAB) "To those who sinned before, and to everyone else, I repeat the warning I gave last time; on my second visit I gave it in person, and

now I give it while absent. It is that when I come this time, I will show no leniency.” (REB) The “rest” (“all the others”) may designate those among the Corinthians who condoned the wrongdoing, or all the others in the congregation who were not directly involved in the sinful course. (13:2)

In the event the apostle had not been in Corinth twice, the passage could be understood to mean that he expressed himself as if he were then present but was absent when he wrote. Certain manuscripts include the expression “I write,” and a number of translations include “I write” and add the word “if” in their renderings. (13:2) “I have told you before, and foretell as if I were present the second time, and now being absent I write to those who have sinned before, and to all the rest, that if I come again I will not spare.” (NKJV)

By their wayward course of action or their wrong view of Paul, a significant number in the Corinthian congregation had challenged his authority. For this reason, he spoke of them as “seeking proof of Christ speaking in [him].” Christ is Lord, and believers are accountable to him for their attitude, words, and actions. So the proof of Christ’s speaking “in” the apostle or as his representative would be through the punishment Paul would impose on unrepentant ones, and this punishment would be based on the individuals’ serious failure to live up to what the Son of God required of his disciples. Paul indicated that he would be undertaking strong measures against unrepentant ones, for he reminded the Corinthians that Christ was not weak toward them but powerful among them. Accordingly, when Paul would function as Christ’s instrument in administering discipline to unrepentant ones, the Corinthians would see the evidence of Christ’s power. (13:3)

While on earth as a human, the Son of God could be spoken of as “weak,” and it could be said that “out of” this weakness (or by reason of it) he was crucified. Christ, however, is no longer weak (having the limitations of a human), but he is alive as the possessor of humanly incomprehensible power, for he was raised to immortal life. His living is “out of God’s power,” for as a consequence of a powerful act of his Father he rose from the dead. By implication, Paul thus made it clear that the Corinthians could expect a demonstration of Christ’s power among them if certain individuals continued to follow a wayward course. (13:4)

When referring to himself (using the editorial “we”) as weak “in” (other manuscripts say, “with”) Christ, Paul probably meant that, because he had not used his authority to administer severe discipline but had been patient and forbearing, he appeared to the Corinthians as a weak person “in” Christ (in a relationship of oneness with God’s Son). Indicating that this was subject to change, the apostle mentioned that he would live with Christ “out of God’s



power” toward the Corinthians. His “living” would be through the full use of his apostolic authority to correct and punish. God was the source of this apostolic authority, and so the power that would be exercised toward the Corinthians would be God’s power. (13:4)

Paul admonished the Corinthians to “test” whether they were “in the faith,” putting themselves to the proof. This testing called for self-examination to determine whether they were living in harmony with their faith in Christ. Instead of putting the apostle under scrutiny (as many among them had done), they needed to evaluate themselves, making sure that their words and deeds harmonized with Christ’s example and teaching. Their being “in the faith” required that they conduct themselves as Christ’s disciples. (13:5)

That the self-examination related to their relationship to Christ is evident from the apostle’s question, “Do you not know that Jesus Christ [is] in you?” Only by being at one with the Son of God, living in a manner that demonstrates faith or trust in him and the cleansing effected through his sacrificial death can individuals be in a divinely approved condition. So Paul did not leave the question without qualification but added the essential condition for being “in” or at one with Christ, “If you are not disapproved.” (13:5) The apostle hoped that, upon examining themselves, the Corinthians would come to “know” or recognize that he was not in a disapproved state. (13:6)

### **Verses 7-10. Honesty to demand honesty**

If at all possible, Paul wanted to avoid having to take strong disciplinary action while in Corinth. For this reason, he prayed to God that the believers there would not do anything wrong. His prime objective in thus praying was not so that he would appear as approved or as one who had faithfully discharged his responsibility toward them, having aided them to come to be at one with the Son of God. His concern in their doing good or what is right was that they would reap the full benefit there from, being found divinely approved and coming to enjoy all the resultant privileges and blessings. In his great love for them, he wanted them to be approved even if that meant that he would appear disapproved or as having been a failure. This could include Paul’s seeming to be weak, as he would then not be exercising his apostolic authority to administer severe discipline. (13:7)

The use of his apostolic authority had as its purpose the advancement of the “truth,” with the focus being on the Son of God. So, in carrying out his commission as an apostle, Paul would not be doing anything against the truth

but only for the truth or in the furtherance of the interests of the Son of God. (13:8)

Paul rejoiced whenever he was “weak” and the Corinthians were powerful. He would appear weak when he did not have to act forcefully against those who persisted in a wrong course, whereas the Corinthians, after having amended their wrong ways, would have been strong or powerful for what is right. Their commendable course would give the apostle reason for rejoicing. Understandably, therefore, he prayed that they would be restored to a proper state upon taking the needed corrective action. (13:9)

While absent from the Corinthians, Paul wrote forcefully, hoping that they would make the required changes. He desired to avoid acting with severity when with them but wanted to use the authority the Lord Jesus Christ had granted him to build up or to strengthen them and not to tear them down. If he had to deal severely with them, his visit would not have proved to be as spiritually uplifting as it otherwise could have been. The strong measures Paul would have been forced to take would have brought sadness to the community of believers in Corinth. (13:10)

When concluding his letter, the apostle encouraged his brothers or fellow believers to rejoice. They had sound reason for doing so, for through their faith in Christ they had been reconciled to his Father. As beloved children of God, they benefited from his tender care. Nevertheless, the community of believers in Corinth needed to take corrective action. For this reason, Paul admonished the Corinthians to mend their ways. (13:11)

Then the apostle used a form of the Greek word *parakaléo*, which (in this context) may be understood to mean that the Corinthians should allow themselves to be admonished. In its basic sense, *parakaléo* denotes to “summon” or to “call to one’s side” and can convey the thought of “exhort,” “encourage,” “admonish,” or “comfort.” (13:11) Translators have variously rendered the Greek expression as “listen to my appeal” (NRSV, NIV), “encourage one another (NAB, NJB), “take our appeal to heart” (REB), “pay attention to what I have said” (CEV), and “consider my advice” (J. B. Phillips).

### **13:11-14. Benediction and farewell**

#### **Verses 11-13. The exhortation**

The Corinthians needed to cease having divisions among themselves, shunning a party spirit, and to strive being of the same mind as fellow children of God. As members of the same spiritual family, they should have been united in love and

concerned about being at peace with one another, not quarreling because of looking to men as leaders. (Compare 1 Corinthians 1:10-12.) By preserving unity and peace among themselves, the “God of love and peace” would be with them. They would then continue to experience his love and care. As recipients of divine aid, they would enjoy inner peace, well-being, or security. (13:11)

As in 1 Corinthians 16:20, Paul included the encouragement, “Greet one another with a holy kiss.” By greeting one another in this manner, the Corinthians would have demonstrated their relationship to one another as beloved fellow children of God. (13:12) “All the holy ones” whose greetings the apostle conveyed would have been fellow believers from the various congregations where he had ministered. (13:12[13])

#### **Verse 14. The benediction**

The apostle concluded his letter with the prayerful words, “The favour of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit [be] with all of you.” As beneficiaries of the gracious favour or unearned kindness of the Son of God, the Corinthians would enjoy all the blessings that he made possible by laying down his life for them, and they would continue to have his aid and guidance. Reconciled to God on the basis of Christ’s sacrificial death, they would have God’s love extended to them as his children and could rest assured of his kindly concern for them. Upon putting faith in Christ, the Corinthians had received the Holy Spirit and so shared in the spirit as the activating and motivating power in their lives. The fellowship of the Holy Spirit could also have included the mutual enjoyment of the uniting bond of love that their yielding to the guidance of God’s spirit produced. (13:13[14]).

#### **Notes:**

From verses 4 through 9, the first person plural “we” and the first person plural forms of verbs are used editorially. Then, in verse 10, Paul speaks of himself in the first person singular. These changes from first person plural to first person singular are to be expected in a dictated letter that has not been edited.

In verse 13[14], certain manuscripts, including fourth-century Codex Vaticanus, omit Christ, and P46 (c. 200 CE) does not include “holy” before “spirit.” Many manuscripts conclude with “Amen.”



*The Harbour, Kavala – New Testament Neapolis*

## **2 CORINTHIANS TEST**

### **THE SECOND EPISTLE OF PAUL THE APOSTLE TO THE CORINTHIANS**

#### **CHAPTER 1-13**

Now that we have completed our study of Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, let us test again what we have learned. This is a twenty question fill in the blank quiz. You will find the answers at the bottom of the page.

### **2 CORINTHIANS TEST**

- 1.) While we are at home in the body, we are \_\_\_\_\_ from the Lord.
- 2.) The \_\_\_\_\_ of the Lord is made perfect in weakness.
- 3.) \_\_\_\_\_ was transformed into an angel of light.

- 4.) Paul sent \_\_\_\_\_ to Corinth to check up on the spiritual welfare of the Corinthians.
- 5.) When you become one with Christ, you become a \_\_\_\_\_ creature.
- 6.) \_\_\_\_\_ yourselves from unbelievers.
- 7.) God loveth a cheerful \_\_\_\_\_ .
- 8.) We are able ministers of the New Testament, not of the letter, but of the \_\_\_\_\_ .
- 9.) Paul urged the Corinthians to \_\_\_\_\_ the person who had spread the rumors about him in Corinth.
- 10.) Do not judge things according to their outward \_\_\_\_\_ .
- 11.) Afflictions are \_\_\_\_\_ , but they bring eternal glory.
- 12.) We walk by \_\_\_\_\_ , not by sight.
- 13.) A special favor or help from God, which is not necessarily earned or deserved because of good works, given to man for spiritual betterment is called \_\_\_\_\_ .
- 14.) The important thing about being generous is your \_\_\_\_\_ to give.
- 15.) Never be \_\_\_\_\_ , so that the ministry of God is not blamed.
- 16.) The Corinthians were \_\_\_\_\_ that they were persuaded by the rumors that they heard about Paul.
- 17.) Even though we walk in the flesh, we do not \_\_\_\_\_ according to the flesh.
- 18.) Prevent evil from occurring by taking away it's \_\_\_\_\_ .
- 19.) Paul felt that one reason why the Corinthians had trouble staying on the right path, was because he was too \_\_\_\_\_ on them.
- 20.) If you take part in the sufferings, you will also take part in the \_\_\_\_\_ of Christ.

## **2 CORINTHIANS TEST ANSWERS**

1. Absent
2. Strength
3. Satan
4. Titus
5. New
6. Separate
7. Giver
8. Spirit
9. Forgive
10. Appearance
11. Temporal
12. Faith
13. Grace
14. Willingness
15. Offensive
16. Sad
17. War (fight)
18. Opportunity
19. Lenient
20. Comfort

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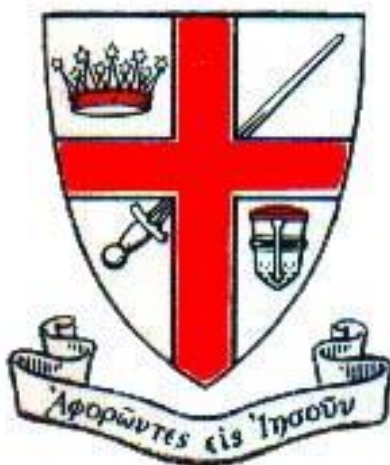
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## Looking unto Jesus

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